

Beyond the Surface: International Students' Perspectives on Success at University

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Dedication

I wish to dedicate my dissertation work to my mum Nelly, who is my number one supporter in life, biggest fan, and friend. She always pushes me as hard as she can to be the best version of myself. I have always known that she believes in me and wants the best for me. A special feeling of gratitude goes to my dad and siblings who have never left my side. Thank you for your love and prayers.

Abstract

There is increasing research interest on the international student experience and student success. Clear understandings remain undeveloped and gaps in the literature persist: ambiguity in the definition of success; focus on specific components of the category “international”; and unclear data on success factors. Using phenomenology, this study explores success at university from the perspective of international students and concentrates on three research questions:

- (1) What does it mean to be an international student?
- (2) What does it mean to be successful at university?
- (3) Which factors, and to what extent, influence success?

In-depth semi-structured interviews were used with a purposive sample of twelve international undergraduate students from one university in New Zealand. Thematic analysis helped identify key themes from the research data.

This research demonstrates that while the official designation of being an international student is based on visa status, international students have different understandings of what this term means to them. The international student population constitutes a heterogeneous group of students whose identities have a double sense. They identify with a group of students who share a similarity of being in a country other than their own, yet they are aware of specific characteristics that make them unique. Furthermore, while some are able to feel like locals, others feel like outsiders.

The study also found that while success is a multidimensional and subjective term, some principles are common to students. Although academic indicators help explain students’ success, a more comprehensive measure that incorporates different aspects of development in

students is needed. Multidimensional success encompasses the various plans that students have for their university life, with priorities that are highly individuated. Moreover, there are multiple and interrelated success factors that relate to three dimensions: intrapersonal characteristics, interpersonal processes, and institutional arrangements.

My study adds to the literature on international education by providing an in depth understanding of international students' construction of what it means to be a successful student at a foreign university. It provides current and future international students with a tool that serves as a trigger for reflection that could help them in making sense of their individual experience and supporting a greater understanding of who they are as students and what would contribute to their success at university. The study also provides a basis for encouraging university representatives to reflect on their expectations about international students and find better ways to contribute to their success. This research outlines the implications for a comprehensive approach to address distinctive needs, one that enables international students to reach their full potential, promoting inclusion, equity, equality and educational quality.

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Chapter One: Introducing my Study



Introduction

What do you see in this picture? Perhaps “human shadows”, yet many other things are obscured by the image. These are the shadows of six international students on a university campus as they paused for a moment to relax and reboot. Two of them wore their traditional clothing on that day as they usually do. This is a diverse group of students. Some of them have partners and raise dependent children and some have other family members living with them; however, others are in New Zealand on their own. For at least three of these students, being in this country is their first time in a foreign country. Moreover, some struggle more than others do to cope with the multiple hurdles they face and the demands of being a university student in a foreign country. Each of these six comes from a different country.

Among other things, they have different cultural backgrounds, knowledge and skills, needs, interests, and expectations of university life. While everything shown in this image is people casting shadows on to a grass lawn, the context of this research included a global health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and a terror attack in Christchurch that claimed many lives. Now that I have spoken about this picture, consider what you now see. You may wonder why you had not previewed what has just been described. The image hides almost everything; therefore, you need to look beyond its surface to see what lies beneath, or to deepen your understanding of the people in the image.

This doctoral work is about twelve international undergraduates studying in one university in New Zealand. It uncovers their lived experiences and views of what it is like to be an international student successfully experiencing the world of university. Participating students were given a voice and helped articulate their lived experiences, while researcher reflexivity contributed to deeper interpretations of the meanings generated through the research.

There is increasing public and policy interest in the international student experience in higher education as well as the outcomes international students achieve (Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010). Extensive research has been carried out on international students, yet some evidence suggests a need for deeper analysis. Developing in depth interpretations of the way international students make sense of their own world is a means to better understand their lived experience, and thus identify specific areas that when addressed could be lynchpins for reform and redesign of student support strategies. There is a lack of clarity about the concept of the status international student; the term has varied meanings when used in different contexts (Bista, 2016), and only few research studies have paid attention to the differences in how it is defined. Moreover, research that has looked at international students and their academic success commonly measures success through course grades (Mapuranga, Musingafi

& Zebron, 2015; York, Gibson & Rankin, 2015); only a few studies have engaged with dimensions of success beyond academic performance.

From a practical standpoint, this study contributes to the literature on international and higher education. It provides a framework for higher education providers to encourage future analysis, policies, and actions based on a holistic approach to enhance international students' abilities to reach their goals and help them fulfill their potential. It also offers a basis for both current and future international students to reflect about their own experiences, and in turn develop a better understanding of their competences, potential challenges to be faced once in the host country, and opportunities made available to them. This could increase their self-awareness and empower them to have more control over their ability to reach both their goals at university and their lifelong learning goals.

Rationale for the Study

The global population of internationally mobile students has increased in the last decades, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (OECD, 2017, 2018). Furthermore, a notable trend in this modern era of globalization is the growing number of international students in higher education (OECD, 2015, 2018; Vargas, 2007). Pursuing studies at a foreign university could be an exciting goal for many students, but a very challenging experience for some of them due to the multiple difficulties they may encounter in their adjustment to the new environment (Yeoh & Terry, 2013). These perceived difficulties could hinder international students' chances of success at university. For example, Kilinc and Granello (2003) found that the different challenges faced by some international students can negatively impact on their mental health, physical health, and academic life. As Chan and Drover (1997) have maintained, universities might not be able to tackle all these

challenges or shield students from them all, although they could design different strategies to help students overcome them.

they can introduce formal and informal mechanisms to make the initial transition more smooth, to sensitise local students and staff to the significance of cultural differences, to encourage intercultural communication, to promote participation at different levels of institutional decision-making, and to foster a sense of belonging (Chan & Drover, 1997, p.59)

Despite increasing scientific interest in research with international students, gaps in the research literature persist. There is no accepted definition of what an international student is; definitions and criteria differ from country to country. Bista (2016) explains that although the term international student commonly refers to all mobile students, many other terminologies are also used to classify them including foreign students, non-immigrant students, transnational students, inbound/outbound students, and guest students. Furthermore, research on students' success focuses on academic performance measured through grades and scores (Mapuranga et al., 2015). York et al. (2015) found that concepts such as student success and academic success are commonly used interchangeably. However, new evidence suggests the need for a broader approach in analyzing and measuring student success, an approach that involves different indicators that include but are not restricted to the student's academic outcomes (Cuseo, Fecas, & Thompson, 2007; York et al., 2015). Furthermore, literature indicates markedly different perceptions of lecturers and students towards what constitutes student success (Fraser & Killen, 2003). The differences in perceptions may contribute to confusing and misleading assumptions regarding the international student experience in higher education.

Little is known about mechanisms to achieve success at university among international students. This view was exemplified in the comments of Eze and Inegbedion (2015), who expressed that research has examined issues faced by international students and their academic performance, but "an integration of research is still not yet well developed" (p.56).

This view has been supported by writers such as He and Banham (2009), who argue that little is known about these students' academic performance and its determinants. According to Banjong (2015), although research looks at the experience and challenges faced by international students, only "a few studies have examined how these international students still succeed academically despite the odds" (p.132). Additionally, it seems as though research has concentrated on the impact caused by different factors on the academic behaviour of international students of particular nationalities, mostly from Asian backgrounds, in Western educational institutions. However, little research has considered students from different nations and cultural background, limiting the understanding of learning behaviour dynamics across cultures (Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010).

The literature includes a diversity of opinions about international student outcomes in tertiary studies (He & Banham, 2009). Students are expected to produce good academic outcomes; however, they may turn out to be different from what is expected. There is no guarantee that students who satisfy specific admission criteria will finally satisfy the graduation requirements (Mapuranga et al., 2015), potentially because "many encounter difficulties in their quest to be academically successful in their new learning environment" (Carroll & Ryan, 2005:2007, p.5). For example, evidence has shown that although international students have high aspirations and expectations of success, they report lower academic outcomes, higher drop-out rate, lower labour force participation, and lower socio-economic status than domestic individuals (Arias, 1986; Brinbaum & Cebolla, 2007; Carabaña, 2008; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Kristen & Granato, 2007; Luciak, 2004; Rothon, 2007). However, scholars have also suggested that international students have a tendency to perform better than local students (Hirshman & Morrison, 1986; Rothon, 2007). As found by Stoyhoff (1997), "the vast majority of international students, even those with lower language proficiency, appear to succeed in university" (p.63).

The literature shows a lack of consensus about the identification of success determinants in higher education. Some researchers maintain that entry standards are key factors influencing successful completion of university courses, yet others highlight the importance of non-academic factors (Mapuranga et al., 2015). Lynn and Robinson-Backmon (2006) argues that evidence supporting research on the impact of non-academic variables, such as sociodemographic attributes or work commitment, is limited. There are conflicting views on the importance of some success factors (Osaikhiuwu, 2014; Othman et al., 2013; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012). Further, research has focused on factors traditionally believed to be influential while other factors have been less dominant. These other important yet understudied factors may be of personal, social, or institutional order (Vargas, 2007). Additionally, Othman et al. (2013) point out that studies conducted on adaptational factors affecting college or university students are limited; much of the research on this issue focuses on secondary and high school students. They highlight the importance of looking at adaptational factors and suggest that students may be ineffectively prepared for the demands of higher education that could incur challenges such as: “living apart from family and friends, adjusting to the academic regimen, assuming responsibility for the tasks of daily living, and developing a new array of social relationships with peers and faculty” (p.411).

Research on the experience of international students focuses on commonly studied aspects such as push-pull factors of student mobility, relationships between socioeconomic background and education, narrow aspects of culture, elements affecting the costs-benefits of migration for students who decide to study abroad, language barriers, adjustment and engagement challenges, and institutional support (Alvarez, 2012). However, there is a need of more research on success factors that are likely to be changed, modified, or controlled; the findings of this type of research could provide decision makers with better tools to effectively implement changes. For instance, it is known the direct relationship between students’ socio-

economic background and their academic outcomes. Although this is a significant finding, little can be done or recommended from such a research result as students' socioeconomic status can be hardly changed by an intervention (Montero, Villalobos, & Valverde, 2007). Also, others have noted that there are limited qualitative research in this field of study, as most research uses statistics, quantitative methods and techniques (Eze & Inegbedion, 2015; Vargas, 2007; Wearing, Le, Wilson, & Arambewela, 2015).

The higher education sector is a global industry experiencing a rapid growth and hugely important to national economies, organisational budgets, and student aspirations. Thus, an understanding of it is required. In depth knowledge of the barriers and incentives contributing to international students' successful university life can lead to initiatives designed to protect them from challenges and enhance their university experience. Although this study took place in one university in New Zealand, it raises awareness of issues that are of broad relevance. Its potential contribution to knowledge is of particular interest to the international scientific community. As the population of international students enrolled in higher education has been rising rapidly in recent years, an in depth understanding of their experience could result in strategies to offer tailored support and promote their success at university.

Motivation of the Researcher

I believe that everyone deserves to be respected and to be heard, as being different should not be an impediment to access quality education. That is why my ultimate dream has always been to raise awareness of social justice issues, promote changes in social policies and foster human well-being by striving at the outset an in depth understanding of the problem.

I have always had an interest in people who are neglected or overlooked. I completed an undergraduate degree in Social Sciences, studies that have given me tools to carry out research as well as foundations to understand sociological issues and devise potential

solutions. Further, throughout my professional career managing social projects, I have supported and worked with different vulnerable populations.

I developed an interest in the international student experience through traveling as well as living in foreign countries and being an international student myself. I have observed and witnessed how international students sometimes struggle to settle into university life, which in many cases put them at a disadvantage with other students. Also, although much has been written about international education, the field still lacks a comprehensive understanding of the international student experience.

As I left my home country to study and work abroad, I started to become aware that student development and international education are important fields in which to pursue sociology careers. I joined a team based in England to provide person-centred care for adults with learning disabilities. As part of this professional experience, I worked together with international volunteers, some of them university students having a break from education. After that, I earned a Master's degree in Arts from one university in Japan, becoming an international student for the first time in my life. While living abroad, I visited many other countries of the world, as traveling is one of my passions. Visiting and living in foreign countries have given me a first-hand experience of the challenges and triumphs associated with relocating to another country. Thus, my conviction about the importance of conducting research on international students became strong.

I consider that in this era of globalization, the increasing internationalization of all kinds of activities contributes in making the international experience more accessible to a growing number of people. Furthermore, for many students today, moving to another country during their formative period, although still reduced by the high cost of living abroad, is a reachable goal. Bank loans, government loans, and scholarships open the possibility to some who do

not have the economic resources to incorporate an international experience into their education.

Studying in a foreign country is the dream of many people; however, some of them are likely to have a better experience than others seem to have. Traveling to an unknown country, discovering a different culture, learning languages, and the possibility of obtaining a university degree are some of the reasons that motivate young people every year to apply for studies outside their country (Oliveira & Freitas, 2016). Many have found abroad the opportunity not only to study and demonstrate their knowledge and skills, but find quality of life and job stability. For some people though, studying in a foreign country is less rewarding (Furnham, 2002). From my personal experience, moving to a foreign country you not only have opportunities to acquire responsibilities in the academic field, but also a process of maturity is lived. Living far from home makes some grow as a person and reach a life balance, given that they will be owners of their time and will make their own determinations. However, there will be others who may find it harder to get accustomed to independence, adapting to new conditions, familiarizing with the local language and citizens, etcetera. What I described throughout these lines are the reasons motivating me to undertake this study. I am concerned about helping ensure that international students are given opportunities to accomplish their goals at university, fulfilling their commitments in a timely manner, based on a deep understanding of their lived experience.

Research Questions

My interest is on the lived experience of international undergraduates. Although there is an increasing scientific interest in exploring the international student experience, there is still limited information in the literature. This qualitative interpretive study leads to the

exploration of international students' understandings of success at university. It was designed to answer three research questions:

1. What does it mean to be an international student?
2. What does it mean to be successful at university?
3. Which aspects, and to what extent, influence success?

The first question seeks to identify whether students have the same understanding of the status international student to the official designation that is based on visa status, enrolment status and the cost of fees for tuition. The second question aims to explore the constructed meaning of success at university as reported by international students themselves, as well as knowing whether they consider to be experiencing success or failure—self-performance review. The third research question looks at exploring student perceptions of what helps them succeed in university.

My Position

The researcher plays an important role in the conduct of a qualitative study (Greenbank, 2003). I played an emic role in this study by using my previous and current international experience as an aid to interpret meanings. I have been aware of as well as been reflective about the different ways in which my position could influence the data produced in the study (Finlay, 2008). A qualitative design allowed me to address the need for a comprehensive insight into the lived experience of these students by interpreting their views. Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault (2015) argue that qualitative research can use an inductive approach to “develop concepts, insights, and understandings from patterns in the data rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models, hypothesis, or theories” (p.18).

I believe that abstracting and articulating emergent themes from these students' experiences into a series of interpretations was important in working against the persistence of research

that sometimes only updates the dominant values on defining aspects and focuses on macro level characteristics. Moreover, different people have their own way of looking at things, coming away with completely different perspectives. For example, research literature indicates differences between lecturers' and students' perceptions towards what constitutes student success (Fraser & Killen, 2003; Olatunji, Aghimien, Oke, & Olushola, 2016), as well as differences in the perceptions of students. Fraser and Killen (2003) state that university students "come from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds that give them very different life experiences, different educational opportunities and a great variety of expectations, needs and academic potential" (p.254).

This study takes the view that being an international student and success at university are two contextually-bond concepts that include a mixture of different dimensions (Bista, 2016; Cuseo et al., 2007; Mlambo, 2011; Vargas, 2007; Vázquez et al., 2012; York et al., 2015).

The different or similar ways students perceive their experience at university, see themselves and others as international, and what they think could have an impact on their chances of success are constructed understandings, created and accepted by people in a particular society. People's ideas and actions are socially legitimated postulates, transmitted by agents of socialization, such as family, school, and church. Moreover, although people adhere to legitimate conceptions, they also build alternative visions and actions as a result of their experience (Santillán, 2006).

Globalization and internationalization are perceived to greatly affect the development of the higher education sector, influencing policies and practices (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012).

Higher education systems need to adjust to operating in a globalized and international setting. Also, there is an increasing number of international students pursuing university studies and other different types of international linkages and collaborations (Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2015; Rhodes, 2001). The university is called to be international in its orientation

and form professionals who will serve not only in a global economy, globalized workplace, but also in culturally diverse societies. (Rhodes, 2001; Wihlborg, & Robson, 2018).

I believe that if the higher education sector remains confined to traditional principles, it might struggle in responding to the challenges that globalization brings about, such as the increasing demand for international education. There is a need to develop conceptual frameworks that add to the current literature on international education; a better understanding of how to address international students' needs should be of utmost importance to higher education providers. The degree to which universities operate with a critical evaluation, based on identifying and meeting students' needs, could determine if they maximize these students' chances of success.

Thesis Outline

This doctoral thesis is composed of seven chapters. Chapter one introduces the study, its background, and my personal motivation and position. The rationale of the study that explains this work's significance is outlined, providing details on how and what the study will contribute as well as who could benefit from it. Also, chapter one develops and articulates research questions relating to the purpose of the study.

The second chapter introduces contextual information that indicates the root of the topic being studied. This chapter builds a conceptual structure by synthesizing relevant literature that has led to identify trends as well as gaps in the international research.

Chapter three discusses the theoretical framework and research design that guide this study. It highlights key elements of the research process: ontology, epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. The last section of chapter three discusses methods to assess the rigour of this study as well as ethical considerations.

Chapter four starts with the participants' profiles. This chapter presents the research data, based upon the methodology I used to gather information. It provides a description of the students' understandings, organized thematically, in regards to the research questions.

Chapter five introduces the stories of Maria and Enrique, two composite narratives concerning the experiences of the twelve international students who voluntarily participated in this research. This works as a transition chapter to segue between the results chapter to the discussion chapter. The composite narratives are also used to help discuss the implications for practice presented in chapter seven.

Chapter six is the discussion chapter based on the exploration of the interpretations that came from the data gathered. This chapter discusses what has been learned from the data; reflexivity is used to help develop in depth interpretations of the themes discovered.

Chapter seven, based on the final comments on all the basic points in the argument held in this research, answers the three questions posed in the introduction. It also offers research implications, suggestions for research, and my personal lessons. This chapter focuses on inspiring new questions that could lead to further research. It aims at leaving the readers with an understanding of why the arguments and findings could be important in a broader context or how they can apply to a larger concept and context.

Chapter Summary

This introduction chapter sets out the specifics of my research. It orients the readers to the inquiry presented in the body of my dissertation, emphasizing what this doctoral work focuses on. I reserve more detailed or extended arguments for other chapters. In the following chapter, I discuss in great depth an overview of previous research in the field researched, into which my thesis fits.

Chapter Two: What Does the Literature Tell Us?

Introduction

This chapter reviews recent and relevant literature addressing international students and their success at university. Chapter two is sub-divided into four sections. The first section proceeds with stating the context in which this study is carried out, presenting prerequisite essential information on globalization, education and internationalization. While the second section presents perspectives on definitions of the category international student, the third section outlines current perspectives on how to define success for international students in post-secondary education. The last section synthesizes some of the most common views on what might influence international student success.

Setting the Context

We live in a globalized world, and it is argued that increased globalization has influenced different aspects of life, contributing to changes in the way we live. Although the idea of globalization has become commonplace and gained popularity in different parts of the world, its meaning is imprecise (Giddens, 2003; Lee & Vivarelli, 2006). Some authors see globalization as standardization, a worldwide phenomenon that has made individuals, communities, and societies change due to a sort of international integration arisen from interchanging ideas, goods, services, and culture (Giddens, 1990; Nistor, 2007).

Other approaches do not view globalization as the dominance of some countries, as they argue this idea inclines to minimize differences between and within areas of the world (Robertson, 1995). According to these views, the world is not growing similarly but pluralistically, as there is a simultaneous occurrence of two processes: globalization and

localization (Ritzer, 2003). Thus, manifestations of globalization are observed differently in specific localities as local spaces are shaped by globalized tendencies as well as by local circumstances (Sucháček, 2011). This idea emphasizes the differences within and between regions as well as the possibility that both social groups and individuals have to “adapt, innovate, and maneuver within a glocalized world” (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002, p.59).

Moreover, while some authors usually see globalization as primarily an economic process, others oppose this limiting idea by stating that globalization is a complex phenomenon that embraces different components instead (Giddens, 1990). As Woodward, Drager, Beaglehole, and Lipson (2002) pointed out, “globalization is a multidimensional process encompassing economic, social, cultural, political, and technological components, and that it defines much of the environment within which health is determined” (p.3).

There are also studies emphasizing that globalization affects countries of the world at different levels as its features are not fixed for everyone. From this standpoint, globalization is a powerful phenomenon that has connected the lives of people all across the world, although it is not felt in the same degree everywhere. It seems that the variation in the effect of globalization is very country-specific, as meanings are attached to it based on contextual differences and circumstances. For example, researchers argue that its effects depend on the income level of the countries as well as their economic structure; its impact on economic growth increases in countries with better-educated workforce as well as well-developed financial systems (Samimi & Jenatabadi, 2014). It is also said that the pace of globalization depends on removing barriers to trade, economic liberalization, so the more free trade, the better a country’s economic performance (Siddiqui, 2017). Although the beneficial avenues opened up by globalization for some countries, problems related to inequality, poverty or unemployment still persist in the developing world (Siddiqui, 2017). Researchers such as Bakhtiari and Shajar (2006) state boldly that developed as much as developing countries have

education deficits, although the problem is greater in developing countries. They noted that unequal access to education, illiteracy and low skills, is a problem faced by many countries that leads to social exclusion, wage inequality and income distribution.

Several contrasting views exist concerning the impact of globalization on societies.

Researchers such as Rifai (2013) argue that globalization has affected the different regions of the world transforming various aspects or dimensions of modern life. When discussing the implications of globalization for occupational class structures, several studies suggest that as the world moves towards a more flexible open labour market, national class structures fragment. In this 21st century a new label has appeared, the “precariat”, a group that has minimal trust in relationships with both capital and the state. Some of the defining features of this group is the lack of job related security and stability and being vulnerable to loss of citizen’s rights (Standing, 2011). This group is a sort of emerging class of people that includes those who work for wages, on-account workers, and unregistered workers. It also includes “seasonal workers, temporary workers, involuntary part-time workers, ostensibly self-employed persons that are in fact dependent contractors, or unemployed persons without the prospects of social integration who are supported by active labour market policy measures” (Kopycińska & Kryńska, 2016, p.81).

Among other impacts of globalization, some authors have suggested the migration of skilled workers who move abroad seeking better opportunities and benefit from higher wages, a situation that also reflects a decrease of skilled labour in their home countries (Hamdi, 2013). Moreover, there are links between immigration and the notion of precariat (Jørgensen, 2016). A proportion of the precariat consist of migrants, a disadvantaged workforce whose work experience in many cases is characterized by informality and uncertainty, not well recognized and remunerated (Schierup, Alund, & Likic-Brboric, 2015).

International research has also studied the impact of globalization on culture and economic growth in developed and developing countries. Raikhan, Moldakhmet, Ryskeldy, and Alua (2014) noted that globalization enhances cultural exchange that has both positive and negative consequences. In their view, it promotes interaction between people, enabling them to learn from each other and expand cultural ties between them; however, it might lead to loss of cultural identity. People are more familiar with other cultures, and thus some cultures have changed as a consequence of being exposed to ideas and values of others. Regarding countries' economic growth, while some researchers have mainly supported the notion that an international financial integration promotes economic growth, others have disagreed with that idea. A third group of researchers hold the view that there is not necessarily a linear relationship between globalization and growth, underscoring the important effect of countries' complementary policies (Samimi & Jenatabadi, 2014).

Additionally, some have pointed out that processes of globalization have had a profound impact on education systems worldwide affecting them in many important ways. For example, Hamdi (2013) explains that globalization increases the demand for high skilled workers, thus encourages people to gain higher education. The author also emphasizes that, among other things, there is a direct relationship between economic growth and education. An increase in the country's economic growth allows designating more funding to education to the poor, which in turn would contribute to decreasing illiteracy rates among them.

Education in the context of a globalized world. Education has a vital role in society and affects it in many ways. According to Bakhtiari and Shajar (2006), some believe that education has been positioned as tool to respond to demands of a world shaped by distinctive and new challenges that globalization has brought about. They highlighted that education is vital in shaping human life and development. In their view, education is “the foundation and essential driving force of economic, social, and human development, education is at the heart

of the change that is dramatically affecting our world in the areas of science, technology, economics, and culture. It is the reason behind social change and scientific progress” (p.96). Others have pointed to the profound impact that education has on population health, human rights as well as population growth (Bakhtiari & Shajar, 2006; Potts, 2015). For example, researchers such as Adewusi and Nwokocha (2018) have found that women with less educational qualifications are more likely to experience child mortality than women with higher qualifications. Similarly, Bakhtiari and Shajar (2006) affirm that education affects people’s awareness of their rights and obligations as citizens, enabling them to get involved in their local communities.

Globalization highly values the advancement of science and technological innovation as knowledge and information contribute to restructuring the social-economic system (Vargas, 2007). Although the uneducated and unskilled are disadvantaged groups in the global market, having access to education seems to be not enough. Benefiting from globalization requires people to have the grounding that enables them to build skills and knowledge demanded by the knowledge society (Baporikar, 2014) or other associated ideas that include knowledge economy (Shields, 2013). These are used to explain that the future of countries mainly depends on the exploitation of knowledge and information. New knowledge and skills are needed in fields such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (Bakhtiari & Shajar, 2006; Punie, Cabrera, Bogdanowicz, Zinnbauer, & Navajas, 2006; Sharma, Fantin, Prabhu, Guan, & Dattakumar, 2016). These ideas were also commented on by Avgerou (2002), who was of the view that “The technological potential for information processing and communication that emerged in this historical period becomes the fundamental source of productivity and power for the restructuring of a socio-economic system prone to crisis” (p.100).

Researchers hold the view that the application of knowledge, rather than only the ownership of capital, generates wealth and leads to economic growth. This knowledge-based discourse highlights that the tangible and intangible value of a good or service come more from the knowledge used in its production—intellectual capability—rather than only from the physical inputs or natural resources used. It refers to the need for human resources that are able to think rather than merely perform specific and predetermined tasks (Drucker, 1969; Powell & Snellman, 2004). In this view, the capacity of the national economies to produce and use knowledge, as a key driver of economic competitiveness, influences their effectiveness. Paličková (2014) emphasized that a country's competitiveness is mainly based on both quality and technological progress—innovations. Knowledge and information make possible technological progress that adds value to the economic production through productivity growth: “The technological and informational progress results in the rise of the efficiency of the human, financial, scientific potential of each country” (Haller, 2011, p.7).

In this globalized context human capital acquires more value (Vargas, 2007), being considered an important factor for economic growth or performance (Figuerola, 2015; Fitzsimons, 2017). The OECD (2001) recognizes that human capital implies a focus on “knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being” (p.18). Human capital is not only measured through IQ but also comprises different skills and knowledge that can be applied in different circumstances (Burgess, 2016). Education is an investment that vary in different contexts and contributes boosting people's human capital, which in turn leads to increase productivity and economic growth (Liao, Du, Wang, & Yu, 2019).

Literature has highlighted the effects of globalization on different sectors of education, including higher education (Rena, 2010). Globalization comprises of “the economic, political, and societal forces pushing 21st century higher education toward greater international

involvement” (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p.290). The demands of the knowledge-based society have added weight to the importance of higher education to enable knowledge work. There is a need for a highly-qualified and skilled workforce that in turn fuels the growing demand for higher education across the world (Vargas, 2007). As presented in Appendix A, in OECD and G20 countries, statistics have shown that between 2005 and 2013 the number of people with a tertiary qualification increased by 45 percent, being estimated to keep increasing by 2030 (OECD, 2015). Furthermore, in 2018, the number of international students enrolled in tertiary education in the world was 5.6 million, and the number has grown on average by 4.8% per year between 1998 and 2008 (OECD, 2020). Research suggests that higher education has significantly expanded, which implies more degrees, courses, specialization, departments and facilities, providing more variety, serving different purposes and meeting a variety of needs (Education New Zealand, n.d., 2017; Fraser & Killen, 2003; Luhanga, 2009; Mellors-Bourne, Humphrey, Kemp, & Woodfield, 2013; Mitchel & Nielsen, 2012; OECD, 2010, 2013, 2017, 2018; United Nations, 2013; Universities U.K, 2014; Yadav, Bharadwaj, & Pal, 2012).

Tertiary education institutions are called to train and build up capability to compete in this knowledge-based global economy, providing people with specialised skills and knowledge. There is a need for training domestic as well as international students to engage and perform in an environment that is increasingly international and multicultural. Knight’s (2008) work pointed out that in this current interconnected world, higher education prepares students for coping with emerging trends as well as realities. Universities equip students with a broader worldview, improve their teamwork skills, and prepare them for effective cross-culture communication (Cattaneo, Meoli, & Signori, 2016). After a period of strongly emphasizing the need for expanding mainly primary and secondary education to achieve economic development, the World Bank (2002) revisited its framework for higher education and

recognized that it contributes to rising national productivity and regulates living standards and the country's capability to take part and compete in the global context.

Despite the growing importance of higher education, the increase in the demands and enrolment is an important problem for some developing countries. Resources do not necessarily keep pace with escalating enrolments and costs. Hostile macroeconomic conditions have contributed to reduce the capacities of some developing governments to support expenditures for higher education, which in turn affects aspects such as quality, access, and competitiveness (Peercy & Svenson, 2016; Rena, 2010). Investing in primary education still appear to be the main priority for many countries (Peercy & Svenson, 2016). Additionally, there is an increase of small institutions with high unit costs and graduate unemployment that weaken research output, and although an increased access to higher education among minority groups, it seems to remain elitist (Oliver, 2004). Existing social inequalities, such as uneven distribution of wealth, influence people's ability to compete. This is the case of people from minority or marginalised groups, such as groups from remote areas and indigenous groups, whose access to higher education is limited and below national averages (Rena, 2010).

Internationalization of higher education. The topic of internationalization and higher education has caught much attention of the research community (Abraham & von Brömssen, 2018; Rezaei et al., 2018). Internationalization has influenced political, economic and socio-cultural development at different levels, and its impact on education (Dolby & Rahman, 2008) and the higher education sector has also been remarkable (Crăciun, 2018; Griffith, 2017; Isserstedt & Schnitzer, 2005; Knight, 2008).

Internationalization, which is a priority for many governments, has become widespread among higher education institutions. However, while it has been researched intensively, the

research community has presented information about looking at internationalization from different perspectives (Knight, 2008). One of the current topics of debate in the empirical and theoretical literature is whether internationalization is a new concept. Some researchers have brought up the topic that the growing trend of internationalization has old roots, being a rehash of an older phenomenon rather than a new phenomenon (Cattaneo et al., 2016; Harder, 2010).

Previous literature suggests that the foundations of colonialism contributed inspiring early expressions of international education (Matthews & Sidhu, 2005). Education was globally integrated under colonial regimes, helping disseminate ideas that served the political and economic aspirations of European countries, promulgating their civilization and helping develop a global consciousness compatible with their interests (Rizvi, 2007). The philosophy and structure of the colonial systems of higher education echoed those of the colonial centre by, for example, following the same curriculum, assessing students in the same manner, encouraging students to assimilate to the culture of the colonial powers, portraying its culture as superior or civilized (Rizvi, 2007). Supporting the idea that the phenomenon of internationalization has old roots, researchers such as Clyne, Marginson, and Woock (2001) have maintained that the term international comprises relations between nations, and international relations are as old as nations. It is also said that individuals as well as ideas have always moved across boundaries, being highly mobile and global. This was an important characteristic of Europe in the 12th and 13th century when different communities of international academics (Hudzik, 2011) as well as students from different European nations (Wildavsky, 2012) formed at several European universities.

Although historical conceptions seem to have shaped the understandings and debates about the notion of internationalization, a different conceptualization has also emerged. Researchers such as Wihlborg and Robson (2018) claim that the growing importance of

internationalization has been determined by the influences of globalization. In recent decades, the concept of internationalization appears to have become more complex and comprehensive (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012). New features have reinforced the international dimensions of higher education (Hudzick, 2011) and higher education providers have become crucial drivers of internationalisation (Blackmore, 2002). Knight (2008) supports this view by stating, “internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization” (p.4). Knight’s work proposed a widely used institutional-based definition of internationalization (Ota, 2018). However, this initial definition was upgraded in order to meet the new needs and demands brought about by globalization, emphasizing that internationalization must be understood at both the institutional and national level (Knight, 2008).

Internationalization means something that involves more than a single region, something that can work for everyone regardless of regional differences (Teichler, 2009). It comprises collaborative work between individuals, groups, and institutions aimed at crossing national borders and seeking for different types of benefits (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012). Literature has also emphasized that internationalization of higher education includes planning, designing and implementing ideas that can be adapted to different cultures and regions, enabling localization for diverse audiences (Anastasiou & Schäler, 2010). Hudzik (2011) proposed a comprehensive approach to internationalization, defined as a complex process that encompasses a concerted and conscious effort that goes beyond simply implementing unarticulated activities called international but internationalizing the university mission by incorporating an international dimension into its purpose as well as functioning. It influences the whole campus life, as it requires that all parts of the institution actively engage in fulfilling the institution’s international mission. The author also argued that there is no single internationalization model. In his view, internationalization is a global phenomenon, yet

individual institutions make it operational in different ways. Each educational institution differs in terms of organization and goals, and their internationalization strategies differ as a result, being understandable that they choose the model or the path that best fits their missions and conditions.

Different governments and educational institutions respond to the challenges and demands that globalization brings about by internationalizing their university campuses. For example, they dedicate efforts to establish agreements for collaborative work with other institutions at the regional, international and intercontinental level (Gao, Baik, & Arkoudis, 2015; Jibeen & Khan, 2015; Knight, 2008). There is investment on students and teachers' mobility for academic reasons, face-to-face and distance education to other nations, branch campuses or franchises, and efforts to incorporate not only an international but an intercultural and global dimension in the curriculum (Knight, 2008). Another dimension, which links to mobility and results of learning, is the recognition across borders of study accomplishments and an international orientation or attitude. Teichler (2009) explains that many strategies aimed at supporting international student mobility have been established hoping "that cognitive enhancement would be accompanied with attitudinal change: growing "global understanding", more favourable views of the partner country, a growing empathy with other cultures, etc." (p.94).

Universities in pursuit of internationalization seek to attract international students (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012). The trend in an increasing number of countries committed to internationalization of higher education has been towards policies that favour and encourage student mobility, liberalizing their legal framework or immigration law to appeal for qualified foreigners (Education New Zealand, n.d.; Li et al., 2010; Mayer, Yamamura, Schneider & Müller, 2012). Some countries have designed diverse strategies to attract international students and scholars that include investing on increasing institutional visibility (Griffith,

2017). Other examples of actions taken by these countries include charging less than full cost-tuition fees and attracting foreign students on a revenue-generating basis (OECD, 2017). Countries such as Denmark, New Zealand, Sweden, and Finland introduced a set of measures in an effort to modify the tuition fees charged by publicly funded institutions to some of their international students (OECD, 2017). Other examples that have contributed to improve some OECD countries' attractiveness are scholarship programmes and degree programmes taught in languages other than English or the local language. Some countries offer student visas for the entire duration of the chosen study programme, which reduces bureaucracy and expenses related to applying and paying for visa renewals. They use digital mechanisms for delivering visa services, improving service availability and reducing the processing times. Moreover, in some countries, international students can undertake paid work during their study as well as stay in the host country for an extra period after graduation in order to seek employment (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Education New Zealand, n.d., 2016; Hegarty, 2014). In countries such as Australia, Finland, Norway, and Canada, permanent residence was facilitated for international students (OECD, 2013) as well as citizenship (Hegarty, 2014).

Despite the flourish of international higher education in the world, there are some international higher-education issues. Some international political decisions pose challenges and threats to the international education sector. One such current example is "Brexit", a blend of "British" (Britain) and "exit" that refers to the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union. When the United Kingdom opted for leaving the European Union, some important concerns were raised in regard to the impact of Brexit on international education. Probably one of the most important concerns is that European Union students will not be eligible anymore for the same fee structure as domestic students in the UK, being required to pay higher fees accorded to international students. This would also mean potentially higher fees for British students wishing to study in European countries. As explained by Courtois

(2018), negotiations are still ongoing and there is some uncertainty about the Brexit's consequences; however, some of the potential consequences might include:

the UK losing access to EU research funding, mobility programmes and collaborations; and loss of EU staff and students; with serious implications for the financial viability and reputation of the UK's higher education institutions. At the same time, Brexit may significantly alter the European higher education landscape, impacting the relations that the UK has built with other EU countries and depriving the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area of one of its strongest members (p.10)

Another example is the COVID-19 outbreak, a public health issue of international concern.

There are important challenges universities and students across the world are facing due to this pandemic. Some universities are closing campuses, suspending classes and examinations, or shifting to online classes, adjustments that might create financial difficulties for students and their family. Moreover, countries are imposing border restrictions and other travel restrictions, and there are concerns for the mental health of students, who might be at risk of infection (Sahu, 2020). We have seen and heard that since governments in their efforts to prevent the importation and exportation of COVID-19 cases have declared a state of emergency and suspended international travel, some international students have reached their home countries, not without difficulty, but others remain stranded overseas. Also, part time jobs that students relied on have stopped, which in turn increases their financial constraints; international students struggle to pay for essentials like food or accommodation and being in this dire situation causes them mental health issues. In addition, as Sahu (2020) explains, one consequence of the pandemic is that the international student flow might suffer a massive hit and take few years to return to normal levels.

Overall, internationalization is a phenomenon researched for decades and different frameworks have been used to conceptualize it. While there are some common aspects in the different perspectives on internationalization, the differences present the difficulty of finding a common categorization or understanding of this phenomenon. International actions such as

the mobility of students has been always part of higher education, but they have recently grown at an extraordinary pace. Tertiary education is becoming increasingly international, as new approaches and forms of international education are emerging; however, there are global threats that can cast shadows over the international education sector.

About the Term “International Student”

International research has placed a strong focus on international students, yet there is no unanimously accepted or all-encompassing definition of the term. There are a range of meanings, dimensions, and perspectives attributed to this concept. Although students are becoming increasingly mobile and destinations diversifying (Garcia & de Lourdes Villarreal, 2014), some of the precedents for today’s understandings or interpretations of the term international student could be argued to have been established centuries ago.

Bevis and Lucas (2007) claimed that earlier civilizations hosted students who moved from nation to nation seeking educational opportunities. Most of them were attracted to pursue higher education study in Athens, a university city. The authors described a remark from Socrates on foreign students in the 5th century noting the presence of the Sophists, also known as the teachers of wisdom. Socrates described teachers being accompanied by young students who travelled to different cities recruiting other students. The Platonic Academy funded by Plato was another centre for higher learning that also attracted students from distant locations. In Roman times, the rhetors’ schools flourished and together with museums served as educational settings. During the medieval European period, the university, which originally referred to any type of associations of people that gathered together with learning purposes, earned a reputation as they became specialized in particular areas or had famous philosophers. Another educational initiative was the “Grand Tour”, introduced in 1670 to offer young students the chance to finish education by sending them abroad within Europe.

This was an opportunity for higher learning and helped develop some experience and skills valuable for future employment—public employments—and status. The Grand Tour served the philosophy of educational trips as well as experiencing through first hand upon graduation as educational means.

Currently, the existence of students pursuing higher education overseas has been well documented in the literature (Bista, 2016). A common definition of international student, which focuses on student mobility and study purpose, is “a student who moves to another country (the host country) for the purpose of pursuing tertiary or higher education e.g., college or university” (Shapiro, Farrelly, & Tomas, 2014, p.2). However, there are important definitional differences between the countries, as different stakeholders use different criteria and ways to interpret this term (Bista, 2016).

In New Zealand, this term is employed in both onshore and offshore delivery to refer to those who are non-residents of the country and have specifically entered to pursue further education or have enrolled with a New Zealand provider offshore (Education New Zealand, 2018). Although the OECD (2018) defines as international to those students who move to another nation with the aim of studying, countries are allowed to adjust this proposed definition and make it suitable in the national context to meet specific or local needs.

Depending on the country’s legal framework for international students or availability of data, the category might include non-permanent or resident people of the country where they study, or those whose previous education was obtained in another country. OECD (2018) defines “country of prior education” as the place where “students obtained their upper secondary qualification (upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary completion with access to tertiary education programmes) or the qualification required to enrol in their current level of education” (p.225). Appendix B gives the different definitions of the term international student adopted by a number of different OECD countries (OECD, 2016).

A number of other researchers have pointed out that international students are commonly viewed as a single or homogenous group of students (Bilecen, 2014). However, researchers such as Madge et al. (2015) agree and assert that students engage in international education in different ways. They support the idea that the picture of international education is complex and there is more than only one particular category of international student. For example, in a world that constantly changes, students who look for an international experience do not necessarily need to be moving to another country but within the same country as international accreditation can be obtained “via overseas branch and niche campuses, franchising and accreditation” (Madge et al., 2015, p.683), and online delivery of education (Knight, 2008).

According to the literature, a move towards a more inclusive meaning appears to be more positive. There are several differences within the so-called group of international students, and thus the apparent importance of placing a greater emphasis on recognizing students’ individuality rather than identifying them as only domestic or international. Foremost, among those taking this view were Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo (2009). They recognized that the category international includes a variety of students who hold different immigration status and nationalities: “they have different rights of further stay, of employment and rights to housing during the ‘writing up period’ of a research postgraduate course etc. It also suggests that the boundaries of the category international are porous, change with time and extend far beyond any simple racial or national boundary” (p.35).

The restrictive notion that international students should be identified or defined as an homogenous group who stands in opposition to the group “domestic students”, underrating cultural differences, has been critiqued by researchers such as Lausch, Teman, and Perry (2017). They state that only limited research has investigated the variation of international students from different cultures, arguing that an international classification for those coming from a foreign country outshines their individual identities, unique characteristics, stories,

and necessities. Bilecen (2014) explains that although cultural differences exist between and within nationalities, these differences are overlooked when broad terms are used to categorize students based on assumed types of cultures, taking nationality for granted. Further, international students have many differences that include, but are not limited to, nationality. Among these differences are socioeconomic status and non-class forms of social divisions, such as age, gender, length of time in the host country. In line with these views, Starr-Glass (2016) opposed classifying and categorizing international students with reference to the institution–inbound and outbound dichotomy. The author called for a symmetric understanding that all international students are outbound students as they leave their home countries seeking for better and valuable educational opportunities that could help them accomplish their goals.

Other researchers classify international students using other criteria. Choudaha, Orosz, and Chang's (2012) categorize students into four different groups within two different dimensions (high/low) of academic preparation and financial resources, and Lee and Rice (2007) added another dimension related to contextual factors, such as immigration legislation and the host country environment, that would displace the students' academic and economic ability in determining their study destination.

Another aspect identified in the literature is that terms such as international and foreign are used interchangeably (He & Banham, 2009). Although both terms bring the idea of students crossing borders, there are important distinctions between them. According to the OECD (2018), despite the understanding that there is an important distinction between the two terms, when information on international students is not available in reporting nations, information on foreign students is used to make calculations. However, using data on foreign students might cause data quality problems, overestimating the number of international students as the term foreign student has a different definition. While international students

leave their home country and move abroad for the purpose of study, foreign students are “not citizens of the country in which they are enrolled and where the data are collected. Although they are counted as internationally mobile, they may be long-term residents or even be born in the ‘host’ country” (OECD, 2018, p.225).

In conclusion, the term international has commonly referred to mobility of individuals across borders, which implies holding a specific visa status. Research has treated international students as a single group; however, recent research tends to view international students as heterogeneous individuals. This new approach argues that although these students move to study overseas, they form a highly diverse group with students of varying abilities, needs, and, among other things, cultural backgrounds.

Defining “Student Success”

International literature suggests two main approaches to the definition of student success: a one-dimensional approach and a multidimensional approach. The one-dimensional approach is dominant in the literature; this approach narrows the term student success in higher education to refer solely to academic performance correlated with Grade Point Average (GPA), graduation, and other similar attainment indicators (Fraser & Killen, 2003; Kim, Newton, Downey, & Benton, 2010; Kot, 2014; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Mapuranga et al., 2015; York et al., 2015). Moreover, the term student success is sometimes used interchangeably throughout the literature with other terms. For example, Kim et al. (2010) used the term “college success”, “student success”, and “students’ academic success” interchangeably to refer to the student academic outcomes.

Limiting the application of the term to academic attainment or outcomes might be a way to deal with the university’s need to provide clear evidence of student learning as measuring other more complex or abstract dimensions could be a more difficult task to complete (York

et al., 2015). Graduating with a desired degree would be an easily measured outcome and suitable indicator of student success as well as an indicator of the institution performance (Hearn, 2006; Higher Learning Commission, 2018). Hearn (2006) pointed out that one of the challenges associated with measuring other aspects of success could be the difficulty of identifying indicators that are “understandable, measurable, cost-effective, and reflective of core policy concerns” (p.v). The author further questioned the assumption that it is possible to identify and implement indicators to measure additional aspects of success as considering both the diverse characteristics of each student and the mission of the institution itself might be difficult. However, his conclusion is that notwithstanding the potential issue of having indicators with imperfections, this is preferable to a singular focus on one indicator.

There has been criticism of the restrictive approach to defining student success only academic-related. Some researchers have raised the point that student success is composed of different elements (Hunter, 2006), it looks different for everyone (Kim et al., 2010), and the lack of a flexible or holistic approach to student success would possibly lead to the neglect of the student. From this perspective, education should involve a transformative experience rather than a limited process only oriented to increasing test or exam results. For example, de Miguel et al. (2002) mentioned the need for clearly distinguishing between short-term educational outcomes—grades—and long-term educational outcomes—personal and professional achievements. In line with de Miguel’s comments, Fita, Rodríguez, and Torrado (2004) contend that grade is an indicator useful to certify and assess academic achievement; however, it is an accurate and accessible indicator only if it reflects achievement in the different components of learning that comprises personal, educational, as well as social aspects.

Understanding success as only concerning academic performance might contribute to confusing assumptions about both the teaching and learning processes in higher education;

putting too much emphasis on narrow aspects may cause educators to overlook important priorities. Research also suggests marked differences in the perceptions of lecturers and students towards what constitutes student success (Fraser & Killen, 2003; Olatunji et al., 2016). Hearn (2006) explains that educational institutions differ in their students' competences to cope with academic duties; therefore, by focusing on completion as the only indicator of student success the risk is "embellishing the reputations of selective schools while tarnishing the perceptions of those serving a wider range of students" (p.iv). The author also highlighted that students' plans are not necessarily in accord with the expectations behind focusing on completion, as some students, for example, enrol and attend classes merely to accumulate academic credits that would allow them transfer to a different institution or to obtain job-related skills.

New demands have arisen which also need to be included in the definition of success. Kinzie and Kuh (2017) highlighted the increasing demand for inclusive excellence, quality, and different and more degrees. Academic related definitions focus more on institutional goals rather than the individuals' needs, limiting the array of realities that affect underprivileged students (Ewell & Wellman, 2007). Different educational providers have dedicated efforts to increase completion rates but this approach is becoming obsolete as it does not represent today's students, who are diverse, face new challenges, and have different expectations as well as needs (Higher Learning Commission, 2018).

The increasing concern about equity gaps in completion in higher education, as well as the expansion of research about ethnically diverse student populations, have provided new frameworks and foundations to enrich different dimensions of the literature on success (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017). Museus (2014) explained that new efforts have originated from noticing limitations of prevailing approaches to student success and the studies they influenced, which did not pay enough attention to cultural realities and contributed to

incorrect assumptions that cultural bias does not influence the experiences of students from different cultural backgrounds. For example, his work found evidence to suggest that all students are likely to encounter hostile campus environments, but students of colour report this more often as well as facing more cultural challenges in adjusting than their Western counterparts. His findings also showed that the racial environment of college campuses has an important effect on engagement, adjustment, and success.

University students represent a wide variety of backgrounds that shape their experience, opportunities, expectations, needs, and etcetera (Fraser & Killen, 2003). In a study exploring college students' perspective of student goals, challenges and needs, Wolff-Eisenberg and Braddlee (2018) found that participating students had a complex understanding of success that included at least two different dimensions: learning achievement and personal development. These students faced several challenges that shaped their experience as students and perspectives of success. Most of the challenges were mainly at the intersection of their academic and personal lives—work, school, finances, childcare, language, transportation, and use of resources and services. While some students with both family and work commitments struggled with balancing responsibilities at home and at school, others reported having issues with communication in English (reading, writing, and/or speaking). Furthermore, while some of them found challenges associated with transportation to college such as costs and reliability, others found it frustrating not knowing what resources are available and for which they are eligible. Students have different priorities competing for time and attention as well as changing goals that should be taken into consideration on the belief that “student success is not just about getting students to and through, but about redesigning institutions to support students in the complex interplay of their lived experience” (Higher Learning Commission, 2018, p.2). The literature also suggests that a more flexible and holistic framework is needed, a new framework that should provide “an alternative to current approaches and metrics by

focusing on the students served as well as institutional success by examining processes in place to support diverse learners alongside institutionally appropriate metrics” (Higher Learning Commission, 2018, p.5).

For those who accept that education should take into consideration all the different aspects of student development, some attempts have been made to identify a broad measurable set of indicators that address a wide range of elements vital for the students’ overall success. These studies have focused on analyzing different domains simultaneously and found that student success could be a multi-domain concept that includes different and equally important student outcomes, suggesting that higher education should not aim solely to create knowledge but also contribute to develop a mixture of different skills. Hearn (2006) proposed that these new indicators of success need to “be understandable, measurable, cost-effective, and reflective of core policymaker concerns” (p.v). According to the author, these indicators could include cognitive gains and other gains such as abilities to find a job and achieve financial literacy, understanding of socio-economic and political problems, civic engagement, understanding of science and technology, job accreditation, global and intercultural understanding, and appreciation for lifelong learning.

Among the researchers who encourage a more multidimensional approach to success, Kuh et al. (2006) used the term to refer to six different dimensions: academic achievement, attainment of learning objectives, acquisition of desired skills and competencies, satisfaction, persistence, and post college performance. Also, York et al. (2015) explained that in terms of measuring student outcomes, Astin’s model has served as an important framework for many other research studies as this model offers “a way to clearly identify academic success as an outcome and, therein, create a focused definition of academic success unclouded by aspects more accurately defined as inputs or environment” (p.2). As shown in Table 1, York et al. (2015) present a model to measure academic outcomes that includes five different elements.

Table 1. Model on Academic-related Outcomes

Aspect	Description
Academic achievement	Students' performance measured through grades but not necessarily learning
Attainment of learning objectives and acquisition of competencies	Affective development and specific goals of an academic programme/course
Satisfaction	Contextual elements essential to the learning setting as well as preconditions for academic success. Measured by evaluations or surveys
Persistence	Sustained progression in an academic degree or academic goals regardless of institutional transfers or temporary withdrawal. Measured through retention and educational attainment rate
Post-college performance (career success)	Extrinsic measures: job attainment rate, promotion histories Intrinsic measures: career satisfaction, professional goal attainment

The trend towards broadening the concept of success has been carried over by many other researchers. For example, in describing different types of effects of college on students, Mayhew et al. (2016) discussed learning, cognitive and psychosocial changes, attitudes and values, moral development, and career development. Furthermore, van der Zanden, Denessen, Cillessen, and Meijer (2019) focused on academic performance, critical thinking, and socio-emotional adjustment to university as domains of student success. Cuseo (2007, July) highlights the importance of taking a holistic approach that includes both personal and educational goals. According to him, this approach emphasizes the students' development as whole persons and involves aspects such as academic and intellectual competence, interpersonal relationships, identity, career and life-style, personal health and wellness, and integrated philosophy of life. His view of success is based on the premise that "successful college students are active, interactive, collaborative, and reflective learners who capitalize on the full range of campus resources available to promote their academic, personal, and professional success" (Cuseo et al., 2007, p.9).

As described earlier, student success is a widely used construct in the field of higher education, yet its meaning is not well structured or defined. Little consensus exists among researchers and decision makers on what constitutes student success. While the most common approach simplifies the notions of success into a specific and measurable concept related to academic outcomes, recent approaches underscore the importance of linking the concept to broader aspects or a more holistic approach that goes beyond the international students' academics. Furthermore, concern has been expressed over the possibility of increasing the risk of adopting a short-sighted view of a valuable higher education experience for international students if success is only defined in the context of achieving academic results. Finally, there is concern about the complexity of measuring out this concept with exactitude, especially if this includes more nuanced or abstract notions.

Influences on Success at University

A range of sources about influences on success at university is evident in the international research literature. Scholars present numerous potential influential factors, and some of them are described as the most common ones. However, given the complexity of this issue it might be possible that other valuable influences have not been considered. Research in this field could be limited by the possibility that success influences and the relationships between them might vary depending on the set of indicators used, studied population, and context (Mlambo, 2011; Vargas, 2007).

Despite a number of studies done in this area, it seems as though that relatively little is known about what influences international students' success at university. Research on success influences have been mainly conducted among high school students rather than tertiary students (Othman et al., 2013) and centres on performance factors (Jaravaza, Mabhungu, & Nyengerai, 2013). Further, work on international students highlights students' deficits and

how to remedy them (Lebcir, Wells, & Bond, 2008). What research commonly overlooks is detail on how and why some international students get the most from their university life and have a positive experience during their studies (Tseng & Newton, 2002). International university students are expected to cope with the challenges that higher education in a foreign country brings about, which they probably have never faced before. They might have to live apart from their families and social network, adjust to a new academic routine, assume complete responsibility for activities of daily living tasks, and develop new relationships with peers and faculty members (Othman et al., 2013). In this regard, Furnham (2002) highlights that some international students are better equipped and have more possibilities to cope well with challenges:

The experience of studying in a foreign country leaves a powerful impression on young people that may last all their lives. For a few the experience is negative and they recall the loneliness and rejection of the foreign country, but for most the experience is very enriching so much so that some people prefer never to return home and to continue living in their new country (p.14)

Additionally, previous research in higher education have not clearly differentiated between factors influencing domestic and international student outcomes, instead they refer to students in general. Researchers such as Vargas (2007) have noted that student success factors might not be unique to a specific group of students. Due to their complexity, some of these factors might be adaptable to other realities, and thus show explanatory as well as analytical capacity in relation to academic success at any educational level and among different types of students. However, some researchers have focused more on the culturally diverse students and the significance of understanding and addressing their needs in order to enhance their chances to succeed (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017).

It seems like the topic of student success has been discussed for many years and a large number of research studies have proposed different factors that can drive student success. Two approaches to identify success factors have been commonly used in the research

literature. While reductionist approaches focus on the analyses of single factors, non-reductionist approaches take the view that there are multiple and interrelated factors. Non-reductionist approaches appear to be the current leading view (Vázquez et al., 2012). As Rodríguez-Larralde and Paradisi (2009) argued, the individual is a product of both genetic and environmental factors that makes such a strongly interwoven network, being difficult to delimit them to attribute clearly discernible effects to each one of them. Success factors seem to intersect with each other, some are more strongly linked than others, and thus what can be done to help students succeed touch more than one single factor at a time.

Some researchers have looked at student development theories that describe how students' growth and development happen during the years that they attend college. As explained by Long (2012), there are different families of theories associated with student development. While psychological theories look at the individuals' capacity to exercise introspection (self-assessment) and their interpersonal relationships, cognitive structural theories concentrate on how students understand their lived experience. Person-environment interactive theories relate to the way the educational environment influences students' growth and behaviour; and humanistic-existential theories explain students' decision-making processes and the effects they can cause. All these theories provide foundations and background for university staff to frame discussions and student support services: "Student development theory is useful for suggesting strategies to promote student learning and for understanding and managing change. Knowing the theory also helps us to better examine how we challenge, support and determine how we might do it more effectively" (Abiddin & Ismail, 2012, p.213).

Furthermore, in education research, socioeconomic status appears to be a commonly used contextual variable (Montero et al., 2007). According to Sirin (2005), Karl White was one of the first researchers in using meta-analysis techniques to study the relation between socioeconomic status and academic attainment, finding that the relation between them varies

depending on, for example, the types of socioeconomic status and measures of academic achievement. After the meta-analysis carried out by White, several studies have explored the same relation but the findings have been inconsistent, ranging from a strong relation to no significant correlation.

Researchers have also pointed out that human-intelligence networks are contributing factors in student success. According to Stiles, Wilcox, and Robinson (2018), these networks are composed of faculty, professional advisors, other administrators as well as students. They have mentioned that providing academic advising and additional campus resources, an opportunity to explore interests and acquire skills in a setting characterized by close interactions with faculty, is beneficial for students. Pike and Kuh (2005) described the influence of student engagement and institutional characteristics on student success.

Other conceptualizations have focused on emotional health and social health factors. Emotional health factors include perfectionism, stress level, fatigue, self-esteem, and using positive coping skills; social health factors include alcohol intake, parents' educational background, and classification (e.g., year in school) (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003).

Researchers have used a wide range of specific terms to classify different success factors. Each researcher develops his or her own categorization scheme, which is not necessarily identical among researchers but in many cases include similar success factors. McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) focused on academic, psychological, cognitive, and demographic factors. As they explained, academic factors include previous academic achievement as well as learning skills, strategies and approaches. Psychosocial factors comprise of social integration into the university system, students' financial situation, motivation, social support, emotional support, and mental health. As for the cognitive factors, students' self-efficacy and attributional style are of great importance. The fourth category comprises students'

demographic features, such as gender and age. For Lebcir et al. (2008), the categories to classify success factors are teaching approaches, students' English language skills, and assessment methods.

Another work is the one developed by Tejedor (2003) who mentioned student's characteristics such as gender, age, and psychological aspects associated with intellectual aptitude, personality, motivation, and study habits. The author also mentioned academic factors that include previous academic achievement and class attendance; pedagogical factors that relate to teaching methods and assessment strategies are; and family factors that embrace parental educational attainment, parental employment status, family place of residency, and study destination.

Along similar lines, Vázquez et al. (2012) highlighted the work developed by researchers such as Jaravaza, Mabhungu, and Nyengerai (2013) who categorize the wide range of existing factors as "psychological, socioeconomic, environmental and lecturer related factors. These factors are raised depending on the stakeholder group being investigated" (p.287). Kim et al. (2010) mentioned academic achievement and aptitude in high school, circumstance variables (situational or sociodemographic factors), and personal variables that "may include attitudes (e.g., motivation, work ethic), self-perceptions (e.g., confidence, self-efficacy), behaviors (e.g., work organization, study habits), problem-solving (e.g. critical thinking , decision making), and values (e .g., personal preferences, beliefs)" (p.114). Personal factors are also known as psychosocial factors (Aydin, 2017). Newton, Kim, Wilcox, and Beemer (2008), focusing on personal factors, introduced "The College Learning Effectiveness Inventory" (CLEI), an inventory of different measures that include behaviours, attitudes, and learning dispositions. The first scale is academic self-efficacy, which comprises students' confidence in abilities, awareness of effort, motivation, and expectations of success. Time and organization management (time management) embraces organizing tasks and structuring

time. Academic stress management represents how students cope with time and environmental concerns, and competing academic demands. The other scales are college involvement, which encompasses sense of belonging and participating in activities, emotional response to university life, and communication in class—effort to engage in learning. Some researchers discussed students' satisfaction, communication and the importance of relationships (Aydin, 2017), racial ideology (Rolland, 2011), and participation in extracurricular activities (Broh, 2002; Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005; Guest & Schneider, 2003; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Rolland, 2011), peer support (Winston & Zimmerman, 2004) and family support (Ceja, 2006; Rolland, 2011).

Although a wide range of studies have not differentiated between factors for domestic and international students, some researchers have focused more on alternative frameworks to understand success specifically among culturally diverse student populations (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017). They have centred on a more comprehensive understanding to help all types of students succeed. Among these researchers, Eze and Inegbedion (2015) found that issues with academic and social adjustment, language, and culture could constrain international student academic performance. They argued that academic and social adjustment problems relate to aspects such as motivation, performance, satisfaction with the academic atmosphere, making friends, and being part of social activities including work groups. Academic issues relate to adjustment to foreign teaching practice, prior academic preparation, performance expectations, workload, student-teacher relationship, study habits and skills, plagiarism, and group work. According to Li et al. (2010), family expectations, English proficiency and social communication with nationals are predictors of international students' academic performance. Also, a study by Chou (2014) concluded that gender, educational level, major, nationality, school attending as well as studying time in the host country influence international students' learning experiences.

Other studies have continued to look at success factors in similar ways. Museus (2014) developed a theoretical model of success, “Culturally Engaging Campus Environments” (CECE) (see Table 2), that underscores external influences, pre college inputs, culturally engaging campus environments, and individual influences.

Table 2. CECE model

Components	Description
External influences	Financial factors (e.g., tuition fees, financial aids.) Employment (e.g., number of hours students work and location.) Family influences (e.g., family encouragement and support.)
Pre college inputs	Demographic factors (e.g., age, race, socioeconomic status, gender.) Initial academic dispositions (e.g., academic self-efficacy, academic motivation, intent to persist and graduate) Academic preparation Cultural familiarity Culturally relevant knowledge Cultural community service
Culturally engaging campus environments	Opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement Collectivist cultural orientations Culturally validating environments Humanized educational environments Proactive philosophies Availability of holistic support
Individual influences	Sense of belonging Academic dispositions (self-efficacy, motivation, persistence) Academic performance (GPA)

A number of other researchers have concurred with this view. For example, Williams, Berger, and McClendon (2005) presented the “Inclusive Excellence” framework, which shows that the critical areas to be addressed by university include student intellectual and social development, organizational resources to improve students learning, learners’ cultural differences, and community commitment to diversity. In this framework, the concept of diversity is viewed as an important constituent of an all-inclusive plan for achieving institutional excellence, which implies educating students to succeed in a diverse society, helping develop intercultural skills.

Equity-mindedness is another model aimed at enhancing success for all students (Bensimon, Dowd, & Witham, 2016). The model was introduced as means to help a higher education reform based on awareness of how different groups have been traditionally excluded from education. It consists of several principles elaborated for achieving equity: clarifying language, goals, and measures; using equity-mindedness as paradigm for language and action; accommodating different learning styles; constant relevance and effectiveness assessment; and enacting equity as a pervasive institution and system-wide principle. Another example is Perna and Thomas' (2006) work that proposed a conceptual model for improving students' outcomes in college; this model embraces different indicators related to readiness, enrolment, achievement, and post-college attainment.

As explained earlier, previous studies revealed that researchers have used different frameworks for understanding critical success factors, which are grouped and presented in different ways. Despite the different success factors that have been identified and the different ways used to categorize them, it seems like some common factors can be identified between them. These factors could be classified into three main categories: the student as person, social connections, and the university. These categories might not encompass everything, but they represent what many researchers have found. In light with this view, Vargas (2007) identified internal and external factors to the student, which then were presented as personal, social, and institutional (see Table 3). Her findings were based on a review of studies from different countries.

Table 3. Vargas' Model

Category		
Personal	Social	Institutional
Cognitive competence		
Motivation		
Cognitive conditions	Social differences	Selecting studies according to the student's interest
Academic self-concept	Family environment	Complexity of the studies
Perceived self-efficacy	Educational level of the parents/tutors	Institutional conditions
Psychological well-being	Mother's educational level	Institutional support services
Satisfaction and drop out	Socio-economic context	Student environment
Attendance	Demographic variables	Student-Teacher relationship
Intelligence		Complementary and specific admission test
Aptitudes		
Sex		
Previous academic achievement		
Entrance examination score		

Chapter Summary

Chapter two presents the scholarly literature related to this study's areas of focus: globalization, internationalization, higher education, and success. This literature review provides the foundations for what comes next in terms of methodology, data analysis and conclusions, which build upon the ideas and existing research discussed herein.

Research about globalization and internationalization reveals diverse attitudes in explaining these two concepts. Likewise, there are multiple views on what could be their wide-ranging positive and negative effects. It could be argued that while globalization denotes a sort of worldwide interconnectedness, internationalization, a new trend with old roots, focuses on intentional decisions to promote international interactions.

Education plays a significant role in the modern world. Both technology and automation change the nature of work, making upskilling a necessary practice and central to this is the role of tertiary education institutions. Furthermore, the general agreement seems to be that higher education institutions are becoming increasingly global and international. Driving

successful internationalization comprises a series of efforts such as increasing enrolment of international students, designing international academic programs, or including an intercultural dimension into the process of teaching and learning.

In addition, in the past literature many researchers have attempted to define the terms success and international student. However, I have identified the difficulty understanding these terms and the different discourses around them that are present in both the field of international and higher education. The term international student has been largely used throughout history in many societies to identify those individuals who pursue studies in a country other than their own. Regarding the criteria of success, it has generally been associated with academic performance or achievement. While some research focuses on analysing single factors, a more holistic approach to success considers different mutually interdependent dimensions and redefines success to focus on the entire person.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter three presents the research methodology. This chapter describes the approach for carrying out this study, offering an integrated stance that incorporates my own personal account of the qualitative research journey. The chapter describes every step and methodological decisions taken in order to demonstrate trustworthiness from the outset; it offers a detailed discussion of this study design, the plan of how this study is to be completed. This chapter presents the research process, based on looking at ontology, epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. The final section of this chapter is dedicated to the ethical considerations of the study.

Research Design

The research questions guiding this study require an in-depth interpretation of students' perspectives on the concepts of international student and success at university. Choosing a qualitative design was deemed appropriate to explore perspectives and construct themes that could represent patterns of meanings across the data. Researchers who engage with qualitative studies concern about what meaning individuals attach to actions and events in their lives. Qualitative researchers collect data to gain accurate and deep understanding of it rather than assess hypothesis or theories (Taylor et al., 2015).

This study results in a phenomenological account of a group of international undergraduates experiencing the world of university in New Zealand. It does not try to quantify data to generalize its findings, but understands students' underlying reasons through focusing on words and meanings. Merriam (2009) makes the point that "Qualitative researchers are

interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p.14). The findings of this doctoral work are specific to its research participants and not necessarily representative of the experiences of other students (Pulla & Carter, 2018). This qualitative work is useful because its interpretative nature can stimulate thinking, new ideas or elaborate on existing ones, as well as building new understandings.

Paradigm

Any given paradigm is a worldview about how phenomena should be addressed and understood, a whole set of basic principles and beliefs within which research takes place (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Under this view, a paradigm is the framework used for understanding the meaning of research data, serving to define aspects such as what to study, what questions to address as well as what assumptions should be followed in interpreting perspectives. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) share a similar view about paradigms:

has significant implications for every decision made in the research process, including choice of methodology and methods. And so a paradigm tells us how meaning will be constructed from the data we shall gather, based on our individual experiences (p.26)

The assumptions composing a paradigm are known to us through a set of defining and interconnected elements, which are claimed by Guba (1990) as ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Crotty (1998) leaves ontology out of his framework and includes methods and theoretical perspective instead. He did not include ontology as a separate element in his schema under the argument that both ontology and epistemology arise together, they overlap, being difficult to keep them apart conceptually.

I believe that there must be an alignment between these two separate aspects of the research design. While ontology comprises the study of being and relates to questions such as what kinds of things exist? the nature of the knowable and reality (Guba, 1990), epistemology

centres on the production and dissemination of knowledge. Epistemology describes the way we know things and we create knowledge (means and conditions for knowledge). According to Hamlyn (1995), epistemology encompasses “the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis” (p.242). In essence then, epistemology provides a philosophical framework to decide what types of knowledge are possible as well as to ensure that the knowledge is adequate and valid (Maynard, 1994). Furthermore, a theoretical perspective is the philosophical standpoint that informs the research methodology. It is the philosophical belief about the purpose of the research to be conducted. Crotty (1998) mentioned that a theoretical perspective is logic and criteria. Furthermore, methodology is a strategy, the action plan that helps answer the research questions, “a theory of how inquiry should proceed. It involves analysis of the assumptions, principles and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 193). Methods are the means, modes, and techniques used for gathering and analyzing the research data (Crotty, 1998).

Research paradigm. Based on Guba’s (1990) and Crotty’s (1998) views, this doctoral study considers five defining categories that inform one another: ontology, epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. Figure 1 shows an overview of the different components of the qualitative research paradigm selected to lead and guide this study.

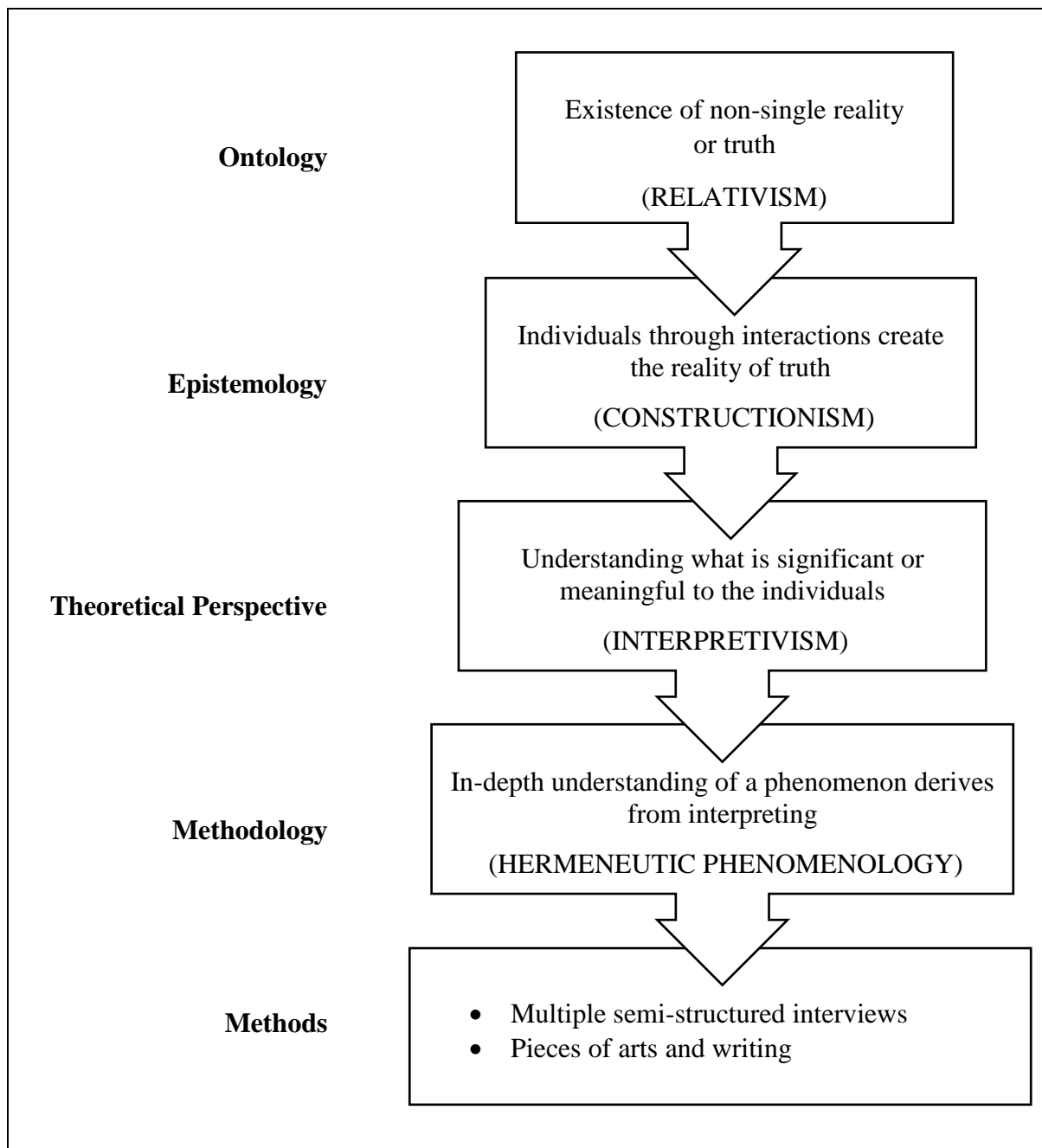


Figure 1. Research paradigm

Ontology. This study subscribes to a relativist ontology. Relativism is the idea that there is no absolute truth but truths individuals perceive and believe. Truths or realities are intangible constructions, they “exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them” (Guba, 1990, p.27). Different people can hold different views about the same

event or situation, hence all the points of view are equally valid as the criteria of judgment are relative and vary with individuals.

Epistemology. The goals of this study align well with a constructionist epistemology. Constructionism does not support the idea that there is an objective truth or meaning, as “There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p.8-p.9). Moreover, social constructionism refers to social constructs, relying on the idea that individuals develop in the process of social interactions (Gergen, 1985). Thus, while the idea of an objective external reality is challenged, individuals are taken as active actors in the construction and development of meaning. Constructivism and constructionism are terms commonly used interchangeably, although they refer to different concepts. Constructionism emphasizes that “knowledge in some area is the product of our social practices and institutions, or of the interactions and negotiations between relevant social groups” (Gasper, 1999, p.855). Contrastingly, constructivism “proposes that each individual mentally constructs the world of experience through cognitive processes” (Young & Collin, 2004, p.375). Put another way, taking the view that individuals through interactions construct knowledge, constructionism emphasizes the production of knowledge and constructivism emphasizes the meaning making of the individual in relation to that knowledge or the internal process of assimilating knowledge into the individual’s pre-existing schemes.

Theoretical perspective. The study adopted an interpretive theoretical perspective. Interpretivism demands to concentrate on subjective meanings (Pulla & Carter, 2018). It concerns “the attempt to interpret human behaviour in terms of the meanings assigned to it by the actors themselves” (Gerring, 2007, p. 214). It lays emphasis on understanding what is meaningful to the individuals—the way they experience their everyday life—through focusing on their feelings, personal frames of reference and interpretations.

Methodology. Interpretative phenomenology is used to explore and gain an in depth understanding of the lived experience of international students, seeking for meanings that emerge from examining texts. Phenomenology in principle focuses on people's perceptions, being simultaneously a philosophical approach and method of inquiry. As a philosophical approach, phenomenology focuses on consciousness and essences; as a method, it relates to the study and in depth exploration of phenomena or human experience (Manen, 1997; Smith, 2008). Phenomenological studies, which do not seek to develop theory, involve the idea that understanding relies on the relationship developed between researcher and participants (Reiners, 2012).

There are two approaches to phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology focuses on experiencing the phenomenon as object of scientific inquiry and describing experiences, while preconceived opinions are bracketed. Interpretative phenomenology, also known as hermeneutic phenomenology, relies on the idea that the understanding of the everyday world derives from interpreting. It goes beyond describing concepts only, seeking for meanings instead. Interpretative phenomenology emphasizes that negating the researcher's experiences is impossible, as personal awareness is intrinsic to phenomenological research (Reiners, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2018), "Description is intended to convey the rich complexity of the research. Interpretation involves attaching significance to what was found" (p.284).

This study required both the description and interpretation of the data. It allowed both rich descriptions of students' lived experiences together with reflective interpretations of their meanings as a continuum and with no boundaries between them, given that both are legitimate. This idea is supported by Patton (2002):

An interesting and readable report provides sufficient description to allow the reader to understand the basis for an interpretation, and sufficient interpretation to allow the reader to appreciate the description (p.503).

Additionally, this phenomenological study required prior understanding (Polit & Beck, 2008). It allowed me to use my own conceptual beliefs and presuppositions, and thus leading me to a back and forth process of constantly reflecting on my interpretations of my background knowledge, my experience as an international student, and the research participants' experience and stories (Kafle, 2011; Manen, 1997; Neuman, 2014; Reiners, 2012).

understanding involves a movement from pre-supposition to interpretation and back again, whereby the researcher's pre-suppositions (e.g., about the meaning of a word or the significance of an expression) are tested in the light of the evolving meaning of the account he or she is trying to understand and make sense of. (Willig & Billin, 2011, p.117).

Methods. The role of this study was to engage with international undergraduates and explore their constructions of what it means to be a successful international student at university. Given that the study focuses on interpretations and meanings, research subjects were supported to articulate their lived experience and detailed thematic analysis was used to draw out tentative understandings. Students were given a voice to tell their stories and through their voices, deeper understandings of their experiences were brought to the fore.

Research Participants

The research population is the community of international undergraduate students, from second year up to final year, doing a full degree at one university in New Zealand. First-year students were not considered as part of the population of this study under the assumption that students who are in second or higher years are in a better position to provide sufficiently rich evidence or views toward their experience at university, and so, contribute to the purpose of this research. After the first year at university students have faced important adjustment challenges that being a student in a foreign university can bring. They have developed some knowledge and experience related to their university life.

Sample. The study selected a small sample of twelve international undergraduate students. Phenomenological research can be carried out on a small sample size as this type of studies aim at providing in-depth information about the understandings of particular individuals rather than making general claims. The methodology chosen for this study required having participants interested in and committed to exploring their lived experience as university students in a foreign country, being able to engage profoundly with their feelings and answers in relation to this particular element of their lives (Wilson, 2015). There is literature showing consensus in favour of using small samples in qualitative research. Problems analyzing testimonies in-depth from large samples can produce shallow understandings of the phenomenon under study (Baker, Edwards, & Doidge 2012). Several small sample sizes have been used for qualitative studies. For example, according to Wilson (2015) the minimum number of research participants commonly ranges between one to three and the total number ranges between six to twenty people. Other researchers, such as Bramley and Eatough (2005), argue that in phenomenological research, the number of participants commonly range from one to fifteen. Others suggest that a sample size between six to twelve could be appropriate to identify meaningful themes (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

I used purposeful sampling, a non-probability sampling frequently used in qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling requires researchers to use their knowledge about a specific population in order to choose subjects who can better represent it (Berg, 2007). The characteristics, knowledge and experience developed by the research subjects enable a detailed exploration of the studied phenomenon (Cresswell & Plano, 2011; Shinebourne, 2011). Participants should be available and ready to participate; they should have the capacity to share their experiences and ideas effectively (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The purposive sampling method used in this study was maximum variation or heterogeneous sampling. It helped in providing a diverse range of cases, participants with diverse characteristics, and thus as much insight as possible into their experience (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). In order to bring depth of understanding to the research questions which guide this work, the following criteria was considered to select participants:

1. Undergraduate students who identify themselves as international students
2. Doing a full undergraduate degree in any discipline at the University of Canterbury in Aotearoa New Zealand
3. Being between second year up to the final year of undergraduate studies

Recruitment process. Finding research participants was a challenging and logistically involved aspect of this qualitative study. Recruitment required a number of different activities, strategies, methods, and flexibility to adjust and change plans. The Student Services and Communication as well as the International Relationship Office of the University of Canterbury were approached at the beginning of the recruitment process. They were consulted about the possibilities to support the recruitment process as they have access to databases on international undergraduates at this study site. Although there were meetings as well as an expressed interest for providing support in this matter, nothing materialized.

The second approach involved a flyer designed to help inform and invite potential subjects to voluntarily participate in this study. The flyer included the minimum information that prospective subjects needed to determine their eligibility and interest. The aim was to have an effective tool that was eye-catching and included a call to action. It had a focal point, visual flow, contrast, harmonious colour scheme, readable text, clear and concise message, and a good use of the space (see Appendix C). The initial design was validated with academic supervisors, critical friends, and some international students. The information was posted on

the University of Canterbury Student Association (UCSA) and UC accommodation Facebook pages. Some A4 hard copies were pinned up on UCSA noticeboards located in Puaka-James Hight building, where the Central Library is located. Many students made contact expressing their interest in participating, although most of them were not eligible. They were exchange undergraduate students and international postgraduate students. The following posts were more specific and emphasized that research participants for this study needed to be international undergraduates doing their entire degree at this study site. After clarifying the research criteria, the number of students expressing their interest in participating decreased considerably but seven participants were recruited. The third recruitment strategy involved word of mouth. Some students, who previously decided to participate in this study as well as fellow postgraduate students passed on recruitment information to their friends or peers. Peer referral to recruit participants proved to be effective; another five international undergraduates were recruited through this strategy.

Once the twelve participants were identified, they were invited to attend individual meetings to inform them about the research design. These meetings took place in study rooms at the University of Canterbury Central Library, lasted on average less than twenty minutes, and helped with building rapport and connecting with potential participants. Students received written and oral information about the study and the implications of their voluntary participation. The forms required by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC), “Consent Form for Students” and “Information Sheet for Students as Participants” (see Appendix D), were distributed. Written information was printed on colour paper assuming this could make it more attractive to students, and verbal information was clear and concise. Although the subjects were asked to take the length of time they consider necessary to make a final decision regarding their participation, only few of them required it. Subjects asked very few questions, and in most of the cases, there were no further questions. Most of

the participants expressed willingness to start with the interviews during the first meeting. Based on an expressed understanding of the implications of participation in this study, students signed and returned the consent forms, while keeping the information sheet for their own records.

Retention of research participants. Keeping participants engaged at all the times with the study and sustaining their participation was my concern. Only one student discontinued participation due to personal reasons that involved withdrawing from university and leaving the country.

Scheduling interviews to suit participants as well as giving sufficient advance notice of upcoming interviews proved to be effective in retaining research participants. Together with the participants I negotiated when and where to meet. Slotted times were scheduled and the participants selected a time to meet from there. There were only a few occasions when they did not show up or sent a last-minute schedule change request. As the academic year progressed, students were most likely to change plans, and two of the most common reasons were forgetting about the appointment or experiencing something unexpected and related, but not necessarily limited to, their academic duties. Reminders were sent twice, a week and a couple of days before the interview date. Facebook and e-mail were used for keeping in touch with participants, exchanging information and agreeing on dates and places to meet or topics to be discussed during the interviews. In this research, adapting to an ever-changing atmosphere, which meant being flexible and adaptable over rigid time schedules, was key. However, it was also important to understand that their being late or not showing up could be data in its own and give insights into what is affecting the chance of the student accomplishing desired goals for university. For instance, some participants commented being overloaded or constrained to a tight schedule with many academic and personal responsibilities. While attending lectures, working on assignments or attending tutorial

sessions were among the mentioned academic responsibilities, personal responsibilities included taking care of family members. Some other students indicated to staying up late and thus waking up late in the morning. Their reasons included playing video games before bed and wanting to wake up just on time for attending classes or tutorial sessions.

In order to build rapport, empathy, being open, sharing, and trust were important (Taylor et al., 2015). In this study, building rapport was a comfortable process that enabled participants to both willingly and honestly provide information, and thus get a greater insight into their experience. Each interview started with a quick chat about general things including a set of seemingly innocuous questions unrelated to this research; the purpose was to set a friendly environment to making students feel confident to talk. Also, participants received a small bag with a drink and varied snacks as well as a gift card including a short thank you note as a token for their participation.

During the interviews, oral and non-verbal communication was used to demonstrate active listening. Although at the very beginning of the study most students kept a kind of formal relationship—understandable considering that we had never met before—it was not difficult to improve our relationship and have a relaxed and effective way of communication. Our relationship was always close and harmonious, friendly and honest. Everything began with laughing together, which helped break down barriers and tension between the students as participants and myself as the main researcher. Reciprocal laughter enhanced the interviewer-respondent relationship (Lavin & Maynard, 2001; Savage, Lujan, Thipparthi, & DiCarlo, 2017). I focused on how to build relationships with them, as I knew they were young, probably had never joined any research studies before, and, most importantly, came from different cultural backgrounds.

Coming from different ethnic backgrounds, students were most likely to have different values and behaviours that I could find challenging to understand: “the meaning that people give to certain activities could be different from your own; even when we speak about table manners, or dress code” (Constantin, Cohen-Vida, & Popescu, 2015, p.697). Cultural awareness was necessary to appreciate the differences and whether what was planned was going to work effectively with them in a way that was comfortable for everyone. Their non-verbal behaviour, such as the way they sat in the room and the distance they kept between myself and them, was constantly observed. I also paid close attention to how confident they looked when speaking in English, their willingness to answer questions, the time taken before answering questions, the way they greeted, and whether they kept eye contact or any kind of physical contact. The intention was to observe their behaviour to adjust mine. Also, key words such as “confidential”, “voluntary”, “right to drop out”, “skip questions” and “contact supervisors in case of any issue” were frequently emphasized. Most participants were open enough to talk during the interviews. Although some talked more, took more time to answer the questions and explained their ideas clearer than others did, there were no major issues experienced in their responses to interview questions.

Participants were treated as experts who possess important knowledge, letting them know that my role was to learn from them. In the same way, using simple language, easy to understand, speaking slowly as well as repeating questions whenever participants showed confusion or remained quiet for long periods were helpful during the interviews. It was crucial not to overwhelm them with too much information that could float around in their brain as they might not know which ones to focus on. The information provided was friendly, clear and concise.

Maintaining a friendly relationship with the research participants was vital. I noticed they felt free to share personal things, ask for personal opinions regarding student life, change

interview dates, laugh, and make jokes during the interviews. It was satisfying to know that the more interactions we had, the easier it was to understand how they make sense of their experience. However, it was challenging and difficult in some cases. One thing to be concerned about was how to control the risk of over-rapport, how to build rapport but maintaining a sort of professional distance (Polsky, 1969). A case in point is one interviewee who on more than one occasion kindly invited me to go out for leisure purposes. I did not give directly a “No” as an answer, kept on changing the topic instead. Opting for not giving a direct answer was thought of being the best option to avoid awakening this participant’s curiosity for knowing about the reasons behind the answer and thus encouraging him to ask about technical aspects of this research such as the role played by the ethic committee, rapport, and trustworthiness. An anticipated consequence was to have a confused participant who uses extra time trying to understand new terms or re-evaluate his participation in the study. In addition, while more interaction with this participant could have increased the chances to get a better understanding of his experience, my fear was response bias. More interaction could have let this participant to know more about me as a researcher, and thus affected the quality of his responses.

Another fear was starting to look at things as true and losing the outsider perspective. There is a risk of becoming over-engaged as well as too familiar with participants, which can cause researchers to lose distance and perspective that in turn might affect adversely the research process. Another challenge in participant retention was that although the students’ participation in the study was confidential, for some of them a confidential participation was not necessarily important. For example, at least two of them reported having told friends and peers about their participation in the study, sharing with them some of the information they provided during the interviews.

Data Collection

Although semi-structured interviews were used to collect research data, participants were invited to fill an information sheet with their sociodemographic information as well as to use pieces of art (photos, videos, drawings, etc.) or writing (reflexive papers) to help express their ideas. Using various data-gathering methods aimed at making this study engaging for the participants and inspiring them to share information while capturing their genuine experiences. Qualitative research is both systematic and rigorous but allows researchers to be flexible and innovative; and the combination of several methods of data collection puts researchers in a better position to gather richer data (Deacon, 2000; Halcomb, 2016). In line with this view, Deacon (2000) expressed that some populations may find it more challenging than others do to express themselves; however they might find it easier to express themselves in ways that match their personal characteristics.

In this study, data collection started with developing an interview schedule and information sheet, and then interviews were conducted. As new themes of interest appeared, changes in the interview questions were made. Additionally, a research diary was used to record key information, thoughts, and reactions during the different stages of this research study.

Information sheet. This instrument elicited information regarding participants' characteristics, such as age, gender, religion, and employment status. Demographic data allows better understanding of subjects' background characteristics, describing subjects, and analyzing the data (Allen, 2017). The information sheet was distributed only once per student and prior to the first interview conducted. Although participants were encouraged to answer all questions honestly, they were not evaluated based on their specific responses. This form was brief and took less than five minutes to complete. When completed, it was collected and reviewed to ensure participants did not skip questions (see Appendix E).

Interview schedule. This set of prepared questions helped guide the interviews (see Appendix F). The advantage of this tool is that “allows for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study” (Berg, 2007, p.39). For this study’s purpose, producing this tool was based on what the research team, which included my academic supervisors, thought and hoped the interview should cover (Smith, 2008), findings from the literature reviewed as well as personal expertise. Table 4 presents the initial five-step process used to help guide the production of this tool (Glesne, 1998; Smith, 2008).

Table 4. Interview Schedule: Five Step-process

Step	Description
Beginning	Identifying the overall area as well as specific topics to cover during the interview sessions
Ordering the topics	Ordering topics in a coherent arrangement, leaving the most sensitive ones for the final sections of the interview
Identifying main questions	Choosing questions useful enough to address the specific issues which are of interest to the study
Identifying complementary questions	Using prompting/probing questions to specify the answers to some of the main questions (funnel questions) while the researcher avoids leading and being so explicit
Revising the interview schedule	Looking for clarity and question topic-fit; creating questions that allow digging deeper, connecting responses to a series of other questions; avoiding dichotomous, multiple, vague and leading questions

Note: Adapted from “*Qualitative psychology. A practical guide to research methods*,” by J. Smith, 2008, Britain. SAGE, and “*Becoming qualitative researchers: an introduction*,” by C. Glesne, 1998, New York: Longman.

The interview schedule had four major sections. The first section was about the constructed meaning of success at university as reported by students, the second section included questions related to personal, social and institutional influences that could have an influence on student success. The third section focused on students’ understanding of what being an international student means to them. The last section included questions about students’ recommendations to the university, their final reflections on their experiences, and additional

information not discussed but also deemed important by them when describing their experiences.

Semi-structured interview. Interviews help create a two-way conversational relationship between researcher and participant, where research subjects use their own words to share their stories (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The semi-structured interview is a method for producing qualitative data through the use of open questions. This method, which is popular among educational researchers, offers flexibility and allows depth to be achieved (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). Smith (2008) noted:

This form of interviewing allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants' responses, and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise (p.57)

In this study, as the interviews progressed, new areas of interest arose and thus changes in the interview schedule were needed in order to allow depth (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The initial version of the interview schedule was updated more than once. The updates aimed at changing or modifying probing questions to go deep into the interviews and obtain responses that could provide clearer information of the unseen. They were based on discussions with the supervisory team and needs of information that appeared as the interviews progressed.

Interview sessions. Between January and December 2017, thirty-nine interview sessions were conducted. Students were interviewed between two and four times, depending on how long it took to cover all the sections of the interview schedule. The interviews were conducted at the beginning and end of each study term. They were audio-recorded as well as conducted in a one-to-one manner and in English.

A naturalistic setting was used. Interviews took place in rooms at either UC Central library or UC Education library. Campus libraries appears to be the student service most commonly used by students. Almost all the interviewees mentioned to frequently use this service and

spend countless hours there not only working on academic duties. For example, based on my observations and experience as a student in this study site, the library is a space to study but also to chat and to meet people. In non-silent zones, you see students interacting, eating, laughing, walking, and other things not necessarily academic-related.

In most of the cases, each interview averaged more than an hour in duration, which was the initial time calculated. When interviewees voluntarily expressed their willingness to offer more of their time to explain ideas and finish giving their answers, the interviews took up to twenty minutes more. In cases when I found myself interviewing verbose participants, I had to make a point of politely cutting them off whenever they did not easily pick up my subtle cues. Moreover, the more interviews conducted, the easier it was to identify follow-up questions that helped with getting an insight into the students' experience and therefore, obtaining useful rich data to answer the research questions.

Interestingly, participants were always willing to give as much information as possible. Furthermore, it seemed as though the interviews were not a burden to the students. For example, when asked if there was anything he would like to add, Reo Roy expressed, "All I can say it is that I really liked the interview"; also, Lavinia Moala showed her appreciation and said, "Thank you for giving me the opportunity. I think this opportunity has given me a time to reflect deeper in my experience, and even I've grown from this interview 'cause when I recognized what are my weakness and stuff I then tried to improve all of those... So it was really fruitful for me".

A research diary was used. This tool aided reflexivity in the research process. Observations, thoughts, and questions were captured and recorded as pieces of reflective writing. Note taking proved to be a powerful aid and effective way of summarizing and retaining key information to be recalled later. The notes taken helped put into context the information

obtained from the interviews, being of a great use to support data interpretation. They helped devise potential themes; identify how recorded personal reactions, ideas and feelings could probably affect what was observed; and identify important areas that needed a deeper analysis. Debriefing and engaging in diary writing were tasks to perform after each interview and while everything that was said was still fresh in my mind. Keeping a research diary during the data collection stage was challenging as sometimes it was difficult remembering everything observed as well as deciding what to record in the research diary. However, anything possible to remember was put into words, being as descriptive and specific as possible. As Taylor et al. (2015) mentioned, “the observer’s frame of mind should be such that everything that occurs in the field is a potentially important source of data” (p.79).

Other methods for data collection. Apart from the interviews, other methods were also suggested in order to facilitate the way students express themselves as well as collecting complementary evidence not possible to obtain through the interviews. According to Taylor et al. (2015), photography and video recording can help get insight into what the research participants find important and how they view themselves and others. Deacon (2000) mentioned that information can be also gathered through creative constructions such as drawings, painting, clay sculpting.

For the purpose of this qualitative study, the other methods advised were pieces of art and writing. Participants had the freedom to choose the piece of art that suited them better to capture and share representations of their thoughts or feelings about the topic of study. They were advised to use videos or photos that they considered best describe the information required. Additionally, non-native English speakers were invited to write their ideas in the language of their preference. The finished writing was thought of as a tool that could be used by them for helping explain their ideas orally. Deacon (2000) described that commonly writing as a qualitative method for data collection implies using open-ended survey

questions; however, in order to help participants tell their stories, other uncommon writing activities are also recommended. Among the ways she suggests to implement writing activities, giving participants topics or titles to write a story or a reflective paper was used in this study. Interviewees received a research pack containing a blank notebook, pen and pencil in case they opted to create pieces of writing. While all of the interviewees agreed on the importance of the alternative methods suggested in this study to help understand their stories, not all the participants made use of them.

Data Analysis

This was a constant process that happened throughout the data collection stage and carried over to the writing stage. In this study, the purpose of the data analysis was to understand the complexity of meanings rather than quantifying their frequency. The interpretative process of hermeneutic phenomenology does not require the researcher to follow step-by-step series of actions to be implemented in completing a procedure as this might lead to a rigid process for researchers who want to construct understandings (Kafle, 2011).

Data was interpreted using the hermeneutic circle, a framework that comprises a process of reading and reflective writing (Lavery, 2003). The hermeneutic circle conveys the idea that while the researcher is open to questions that might arise from analyzing the phenomenon, answers should be found within the texts (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). It implies moving between the different parts (research data) and the whole (understanding of the phenomenon), which give meaning to the other. In the hermeneutic circle “the meaning of a whole text informs the meaning of its parts, and the meanings of the parts illuminate the meaning of the whole” (Rennie, 2012, p.388).

In this research study, data was analyzed using an inductive proceeding, based upon the evidence-data-given. Although focusing on strict procedures is not required for analysis in

hermeneutic phenomenology, detailed thematic analysis helped organize and find insights in the research data, drawing out tentative understandings. Thematic analysis is a commonly used method of analysing qualitative data, as it helps with “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) details” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79).

Data analysis steps. A process of continued reading and re-reading the text helped access the thoughts and feelings of the subjects under study, gaining insight into their experience and understanding the meanings ascribed to. The more the data was read, the more understanding was obtained from it (Mills & Morton, 2013). The reading process also included note-taking and the use of reflexivity in order to identify personal reactions, challenge previous beliefs and assumptions, as well as identifying the core ideas from the sources.

Some steps aligned with the hermeneutic methodology and circle were developed through synthesizing ideas from Smith (2008), Taylor et al. (2015) and Braun and Clarke (2006). The steps were not restrictive, rather a guideline to analyzing the research data; they led to a high level of engagement between the text and the process of interpretation. These steps involved the idea of interpreting the different parts of the written text in relation to the whole data set; they could overlap as the process of doing analysis with a hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology method does not move in one single direction or specific order (non-linear) (Crist & Tanner, 2003). They facilitated an analytic process that ended with themes, indicative of the interpretive phenomenological methodology of this study.

Step one: Familiarizing with the data. In order to start conducting the thematic analysis, the interviews were transcribed. Working on the transcription was a task to complete as soon as after each interview was conducted. Although transcribing appeared to

be a very specific task, a big responsibility fell on my shoulders, as it required judgement to take important decisions.

Deciding the level of detail needed in the transcripts was an aspect to consider. A verbatim transcription was initially chosen, which required representing data word for word (Poland, 1995). This style of transcription implies converting spoken messages into texts while capturing those messages exactly the way they are said or spoken by the subjects involved in the interviews. The goal was to capture as much information as possible, including, but not limited to, emotions that are valuable data to gain insight into the participants' experience. This was also a way for assuring credibility. Oliver, Serovich, and Mason (2005) stated that:

The pronunciation, non-verbals and irregular grammar that are parts of everyday speech can offer important insights into a participant's life and meaning-making that could add richness that would otherwise be lost (p.13).

The intention of capturing what was said as accurately as possible also responded to believe that if the interviewees were willing to help and take time out of their schedules to share their university experiences, then it was fair to demonstrate respect for them by recording their words as precise as possible.

There were some specific rules followed in transcribing. The messages were not paraphrased and grammatical imperfections, fillers, false starts, incomplete sentences, idioms, and slangs were included. When it was not possible to identify whether or not the interviewee used, for example, "ya" instead of "you", "cause" instead of "because" or "something" instead of "something", the grammatically correct word was written. Despite the fact that there were issues with punctuation, spacing and conventional signs were depicted as much as possible. Another rule was not to leave out non-verbal communication. Pauses, laughter, or other body conducts were described in brackets. Although external sounds, such as conversations, people walking outside the room or doors opening, were not noted, a record of them were kept in the research diary to help describe whatever happened in the surroundings while conducting the

interviews. As the interview setting was a study room in either UC Central Library or Education Library, which are quiet study places, there was not much to note concerning external sounds. Only in few times the distracting effect of sound coming from construction work on campus disturbed the interview.

Interviews were initially transcribed verbatim and then as saturation was reached, with less detail. One of the main struggles was understanding some of the words pronounced by the interviewees, mostly non-native English speakers who presented a wide array of accents and levels of English proficiency. Verbatim transcription caused burnout and motivation loss to the point that I considered hiring someone to transcribe some of the interviews. As access to professional transcribers was not possible due to research budget constraints, some native English-speaking students who were not research participants of this study were hired; each of them signed a confidentiality agreement. Unfortunately, the experience was ineffective given the significant mistakes they made while transcribing. After this experience, I self-transcribed all the interviews.

Regardless of all the difficulties faced, it was encouraging that I could start weaving together transcriptions and some early reflections on the data, raising some points as well as identifying common response patterns and new topics not considered when developing the interview schedule. Also, I was able to identify and discuss paradigm cases, “a strong instance of particular pattern of meanings” (Polifroni & Welch, 1999, p.310), and then explore possible connections between them.

This early analysis produced general information that needed a discussion in greater detail, although it was useful to write analytical memos. Saldaña (2016) defines analytical memos as reflections on particular aspects such as “coding processes and code choices; how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes,

and concepts in your data” (p.44). Four analytical memos were written based on entries from the research diary, some transcripts, and findings from the literature review conducted when developing the research proposal. These type of interpretative writings included a brief description of the steps undertaken during fieldwork, information on initial findings, observations, potential themes, thoughts on the research design and theoretical framework, major lessons learned and next steps for future phases of this research study. They were discussed with academic supervisors, whose feedback provided a basis for helping refine them through written revisions.

Once all the interviews were completed and the corresponding transcripts were prepared, reading through the data several times was the next task to be performed in order to become as familiar as possible with the information. I noted on the left-margin of the transcripts what I identified that was remarkable from the text. The focus was on identifying and discussing paradigm cases that unfold for specific participants, and then exploring possible connections between them.

Step two: Manual coding. Open coding was used, organizing the data by breaking it down into small segments. Open coding is a data coding technique to identify codes based on reading and analyzing the written text, “The codes that are applied during open coding are not a priori codes and the researcher should not try to impose his/her own codes” (Blair, 2015, p.18). Boyatzis (1998) understands “code” as “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (p.63).

The codes were developed by changing initial notes to short phrases, using useful expressions that allow logical connections within and across cases. When similar codes emerged, the same code title was used. The emerging codes were documented on the right-hand margin of

each interview transcript. A table of codes was produced, listing the emergent codes chronologically—respecting the sequence they appeared in the transcript. Then initial codes were grouped into different categories according to their similarities. While some codes clustered together, others were eliminated when did not either fit in the structure or were rich enough in evidence, and some emerged as superordinate concepts or categories. A table of categories and codes listed coherently was produced.

Step three: Electronic coding. A software package was used for the full study. This decision was based on a self-perceived need to double check the manual coding, and thus ensure that I practiced good reflexivity. All the transcripts were imported into NVivo software and coded on screen, helping to structure the data. It was helpful to have the coding stripes visible in the margins of each transcript so that they were seen at a glance which codes were used. This software proved very useful in terms of helping sort through the large number of interview transcripts and compare the interviewees' statements on the same codes, saved within the NVivo database as nodes, in order to assure the data was placed into relevant categories.

Step four: Identifying potential themes. In searching for themes, categories were analyzed by focusing on how to combine the emerging codes in order to form themes. A theme, as Braun and Clarke (2006) detailed, “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response” (p.82). While some categories were converted into themes, other categories formed sub-themes, and some others were removed. Each theme was given a working title, and electronically created thematic maps helped visually display the relationships between and within codes, categories, and themes (Bazeley & Richards, 2000).

Step five: Reviewing and refining emerging themes. Similar themes were gathered together, others formed sub-themes, some were eliminated, and others were separated into two or more themes. Checking all the organized statements for each theme was important to assure they formed an articulated pattern. Then a comprehensive analysis was conducted regarding the extent to which all the themes contributed to an understanding of the research data as a whole or represented its meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An upgraded thematic map was created.

Step six: Naming themes. This step required deciding the specific aspects of the research data the themes represent: “identifying the “essence” of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92). Naming themes was challenging task, took several revisions with supervisors, and required a constant process of refining, defining, and redefining. After revising the themes, names that were “concise, punchy, and immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.23) were chosen. A final thematic map was also produced.

Step seven: Writing up. This step was concerned with converting data into written text that makes sense to the readers and does justice to the findings. It involved both reporting and discussing the findings, presenting data and telling the story that emerged from the findings. Themes were translated into narrative accounts (Smith, 2008), an analysis presented in a way that showed its merit and validity (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The chosen presentation strategy included two different and separate chapters, “Results” and “Discussion”. The results chapter “contains the emergent thematic analysis, and the separate ‘discussion’ links that analysis to the extant literature” (Smith, 2008, p.76). Detailed

description of the results is accompanied by excerpts of the transcripts, which helped ensure robustness. As elucidated by Braun and Clarke (2006):

Your write-up must provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data – i.e., enough data extracts to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme. Choose particularly vivid examples, or extracts which capture the essence of the point you are demonstrating, without unnecessary complexity (p.23)

Evidence, such as excerpts of the transcripts, should support the text, as this helps researchers to be accurate, correct and precise, providing a great amount of information that expresses the best of the participants' intentions, which in turn helped increase the depth and richness of text (Manen, 1997).

Research Rigour

The scientific acceptability of this study lies in the rigor with which its analyses was carried out. Rigour refers to the quality of the research process, a guarantee that the study meets research standards and thus results in trustworthy findings. The principles for the evaluation of qualitative data are as rigorous as the principles for the evaluation of quantitative data, but based on different criteria (Connell, 2003).

There are several and divergent views of what is needed to attain rigour and what features should be thought of to define rigorous qualitative research, with Sandelowski (1986) stating that qualitative research is not precise and includes multiple dissimilar methods. For example, Leininger (1994) recommends using credibility, confirmability, meaning-in-context, recurrent patterning, saturation, and transferability; Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) incorporate rigour, subjectivity, and creativity; and Tracy (2010) highlighted the importance of quality markers such as worthy topic, sincerity, credibility, and significant contribution. Some other researchers affirm that reliability and validity apply to qualitative research, as the use of alternative criteria could lead to destabilize rigour, and thus weaken qualitative research (Anderson, 2010; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). However, others argue that

reliability and validity are only pertinent in quantitative studies, as do not fit the needs of qualitative research (Agar, 1986). Other approaches abolish all criteria (Rolfe, 2006).

While rigour is a commonly used term in the rationalistic paradigm, trustworthiness is the parallel concept used in qualitative research (Morse et al., 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria to ensure trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this research, trustworthiness is based on the constructs proposed by them as these constructs have been widely accepted by researchers (Shenton, 2004) and they are “comparatively well-developed conceptually” (Krefting, 1991, p.215).

Credibility is the counterpart of internal validity and aims at ensuring that the research measures what is intended. In Merriam’s (2009) view, credibility deals with questions such as “How congruent are the findings with reality? Do the findings capture what is really there? Are investigators observing or measuring what they think they are measuring” (p.213). However, she also explained that there is no one reality—it is not objective—as reality has multiple dimensions and changes. In her view, judging the validity of qualitative research findings implies looking at the individuals’ constructions of reality—how they make sense of their own world—knowing that there are several constructions of the way a particular phenomenon is experienced.

Transferability relates to external validity. It refers to showing whether or not the research findings are applicable in other contexts (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Dependability is similar to reliability and implies “variability that can be ascribed to identified sources” (Krefting, 1991, p.216). It is concerned with verifying the consistency and replicability of the research findings (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Shenton (2004) supports these views arguing that dependability requires techniques to assure that a similar work conducted with same research participants and methods in the same context would produce similar results.

Confirmability demonstrates how decisions are made throughout the study (manner and method). The term is comparable to objectivity, a degree of neutrality. It has to do with assuring that the findings emerged from the participants' stories and perspectives rather than researcher biases (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014; Shenton, 2004).

Strategies to ensure trustworthiness in this study. In this study, in order to address the criteria for trustworthiness, some provisions based on the ideas discussed by Shenton (2004) were made. To ensure credibility, well-recognized research methods were adopted. Semi-structured interviews helped with gathering information, which are widely used in qualitative studies as interviewing format. Also, the interview schedule, developed to serve as a guide for the interviews, met rigorous research standards. Pilot testing helped with assuring that participants have the same understanding about the meaning of the questions as well as feel comfortable with them. Another aspect to consider was developing familiarity with the culture of participants and previous research on international education was examined to frame findings. Meetings with participants before the interviews were carried out helped with gaining an understanding of their culture and thus establishing a relationship of trust. Also, my academic supervisors and I are well versed in the field of international higher education and familiar with international students. We have worked and lived in different countries, gaining expertise working in multicultural teams and environments. Our previous experiences have made us globally minded and develop an understanding of diversity and intercultural society, being respectful of cultural differences. To get honest answers from students, both privacy and confidentiality were protected during and after their participation in the study. Additionally, both my academic supervisors and I were actively engaged throughout the study. Continuous and periodic supervisory meetings were held at least once per month to discuss and assess progress. My academic supervisors guided the work and decision making process, providing constructive feedback at critical points.

Auditability helped establish credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that auditability is guaranteed when other researchers are able to follow the decision trail as well as interpret the research data in a similar way. To meet that purpose, discussions with critical friends were included (Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009). PhD fellows and colleagues, who acted like critical friends, were trusted people who engaged with the study by providing honest feedback, constructively analyzing weaknesses and issues.

Transferability was ensured through providing background information to help establish context of the study. Comprehensive, rich, and careful description of the studied phenomenon allowed comparisons to be made. In terms of dependability, the strategy used was developing a research audit trail, “a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of findings” (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014, p.5751).

The procedures and steps to follow in this study are described and explained, seeking accuracy and precision amidst the maze of detail, and ensuring that the study approach is guided by a clear and concise logic–confirmability. The methodology establishes a clear relationship between research questions, existing literature in the field of study, and the means by which conclusions are drawn. Also the shortcomings of the study are discussed and acknowledged, to show readers awareness of them and to describe their effect on the conclusions drawn from the research.

Ethical Considerations

This research received the approval of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC) (see Appendix G) and used the principle of beneficence, which involves maximizing potential benefits and minimizing potential harms (World Health Organization, 2009). I did not foresee any risks or possible offence to the research

participants, and the probability and magnitude of discomfort was not greater than the encountered in daily life. Data collection and analysis was conducted for research purposes only, and research participants were protected with courtesy and respect as persons. Furthermore, based on the guide to the collection and presentation of data provided by Taylor et al. (2015), this study took a number of measures and actions to address potential ethical considerations or challenges.

Twelve students signed a consent form indicating they agree on participating in the study. Their consent followed a clear explanation of the research design (Austin et al., 2009). Interested students were given verbal and written information concerning this study as well as the opportunity to take the length of time they considered necessary to make a final decision regarding their participation. The consent form was written in English and using a non-technical language; technical terms were explained in lay terms.

It was clear that students had the right to stop their participation in this study at any time and without penalty. In case of withdrawal, participants could decide whether they wanted any of the information that they had contributed up to that point to be removed. Moreover, during the interviews, they could decline answering questions they did not wish to answer; also, they could stop at any time whenever they wanted or decline to be audio recorded. Upon request, students could be provided with a copy of their transcripts and had the right to review them, asking to leave out parts they were not comfortable with. I took notes during the interviews only when they manifested being comfortable with it.

Intrusiveness was minimized. At the outset of this research study, the twelve participants were informed about the number of times they were likely to be interviewed as well as the minimum length of time required for each interview. They were required to indicate the best date and time to meet.

Following each interview session, debriefing was offered to participants. If it became apparent that any of them was at some risk, upon their permission, their needs were discussed with the academic supervisors seeking for advice on how to proceed. In addition, during each interview session, I had at hand a brochure with contact details for key support resources or services available at the University of Canterbury. To thank students for their voluntary participation in this study, they were given a gift voucher as well as nibbles and drinks every time they joined an interview session.

Any information obtained through the study that could identify the participants remained confidential, yet complete anonymity was not possible as face-to-face interviews were conducted. To minimize the risks to confidentiality, broad descriptions that eschew identifying details are used to describe individual identities (Kaiser, 2009). Rather than using codes self-chosen, participants were enabled to choose their own pseudonyms. This study lent itself to this approach not to lose touch with the human side of the research; it helped connect with participants, who were treated like real people and not numbers. In addition, data that had any identifiable information was separated from the rest of the participants' data and, in case participants used photos as means of data collection, they included non-identifiable images.

Additionally, the study adhered to the University of Canterbury Data Management Policy, which includes principles and practices for collecting, managing, and disseminating data. Personal data was protected from misuse, guaranteeing that it was not manipulated by people other than me. While digital data was safely stored in a password-protected UC desktop computer and laptop, non-digital data was stored in a locked filing cabinet located at the graduate college where this research was carried out. Data such as recordings, notes, transcriptions, and photos will be retained for ten years once this study is published, and then

they will be destroyed. If data is required to be used for purposes other than this study, a separate and new informed consent will be obtained from participating students.

Chapter Summary

I described the actions taken for this qualitative study. It is recognized that this study's design aligns well with an interpretative phenomenological framework that shares with constructionism an interest in the understanding of the human experience. This overarching approach led to choosing semi-structured interviews to collect research data; a pre-determined set of open-ended questions helped to explore particular themes further. In addition, although various approaches have been developed on rigour in qualitative research, trustworthiness was used as a framework for evaluating this qualitative research, and the criteria considered credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Within this framework, potential ethical implications were identified in the design process and addressed throughout the entire research process in a systematic way.

Chapter Four: Students' Views and Experiences

Introduction

Chapter four, divided into two sections, presents data from the research study. The chapter starts with a brief introduction of the twelve international undergraduate students who voluntarily shared their stories for the purpose of this research study. The second section presents the results of the data analysis arranged in themes, patterns of meaning across the dataset that link to the research questions. This section presents five themes supported by illustrative interview excerpts.

Participants' Profiles

In introducing the participants of this study, I have used information from the interviews as well as data from information sheets filled out by participants. Participants are treated confidentially; all of them were invited to choose or suggest a pseudonym for themselves that could be used in writing up. These students are introduced by giving a short biographical profile with the aim of presenting them to the reader, describing who they are and giving an insight into some of their characteristics. Although the research participants are referred to as international students, which might give off the impression that they are similar in terms of characteristics, they are a diverse group of students who come from different cultures, hold different views of their experience as students and, among other things, have different goals and priorities.

The student participants. The twelve students were identified with the pseudonyms of JY, Paulo, Leon, Yuyu, Jnr Rose, Lavinia Moala, Killa, Reo Roy, Paul, SM, Latu, and Kim. Although half of them identified themselves with an Asian ethnicity,

they represent eleven different countries: England, France, Tonga, Malaysia, China, Korea, Zimbabwe, Vietnam, India, Indonesia, and Vanuatu. They range in age from twenty to thirty, and most of them are male. Only Jnr Rose and Lavinia Moala have children to take care for. While these twelve students are enrolled in ten different undergraduate majors, half of them study for a degree in engineering related fields. Furthermore, only Paulo, Jr Rose, Lavinia Moala and Latu have been awarded a scholarship to pursue undergraduate studies in New Zealand. Half of them live on-campus, in university-managed accommodation, and the majority of them have a religious affiliation (see Table 5).

Table 5. Participants' Sociodemographic Characteristics

Name	Age	Gender	Civil status	Children	Country	Ethnicity	Religion	Major	Work	Aid	Home	Study year
JY	20	Male	Single	No	Zimbabwe	Black/ African American	Christian	Finance	Yes	No	On-campus	Second
Paulo	20	Male	Single	No	Malaysia	Asian	Buddhist	Chemical and Process Engineering	No	Yes	On-campus	Second
Leon	20	Male	Single	No	China	Asian	Non-religious	Electrical/Electronic Engineering	No	No	On-campus	Second
Yuyu	21	Male	Single	No	Indonesia	Asian	Catholic	Mechanical Engineering	No	No	Off-campus	Third
Jnr Rose	24	Female	Other	Yes	Vanuatu	Pacific Islander	Christian	Physics	No	Yes	Off-campus	Third
Lavinia Moala	29	Female	Married	Yes	Tonga	Pacific Islander	Christian	Education	No	Yes	Off-campus	Third
Killa	28	Male	Single	No	Korea	Asian	Christian	Information Systems	No	No	Off-campus	Third
Reo Roy	26	Male	Single	No	India	Asian	Other	Graduate Diploma in Arts	No	No	On-campus	Second
Paul	22	Male	Single	No	England	White	Atheist	Bachelor of Engineering with Honours	No	No	Off-campus	Third
SM	30	Male	Single	No	France	White	Non-religious	Mechanical Engineering	Yes	No	On-campus	Third
Latu	27	Male	Single	No	Tonga	Pacific Islander	Christian	Education	No	Yes	On-campus	Third
Kim	20	Female	Single	No	Vietnam	Asian	Non-religious	International Business	No	No	Off-campus	Second

JY. He is originally from Zimbabwe, twenty years old and a second-year undergraduate. JY has no previous experience of living overseas. His only previous experience leaving home was a short stay in Europe when he visited a family member. Also, he is not the first person in his family to attend university. JY does not have family members in New Zealand. His parents live in Zimbabwe and some other family members live in other foreign countries. His mother tongue is not English, yet he is very fluent and proficient at it. JY is a single person with no children, who lives in university-managed accommodation. He is currently financially dependent on his parents, although he works part time to help fund his studies. JY considers himself as a Christian person. He has interest in sports and plays rugby.

Paulo. He is twenty years old and comes from Malaysia. This is his first experience both living and studying in a foreign country. He has neither family in New Zealand nor in any other countries apart of his own country. Paulo has university-educated parents. While his mother tongue is not English, he feels confident with his English communication skills. He is a second-year student who has been awarded scholarship by University of Canterbury to pursue an undergraduate degree. Paulo lives on-campus, in university-managed accommodation, and calls himself Buddhist. He is single, with no children, and has never been in a romantic relationship. Paulo seems to be keen to practice sports; he jogs and plays badminton.

Leon. Leon is a second-year student who comes from a very large city in China. He is twenty years old and has no previous experience either studying or living overseas. His parents are in China, and both of them graduated from a university. Leon has no family members residing in New Zealand or other countries other than his own country. He finds the English language challenging, and he is constantly experiencing tenacious difficulties in English academic writing. Leon, who lives on-campus in university accommodation, is a non-religious person. Although he is single with no children, his plans and priorities for his

university life include being in a romantic relationship. Leon enjoys and values spending some time alone, as he feels it helps him to relax, stop, and reflect. He reported struggling with mental health, and considered quitting university. From what I heard and saw, he has problems with stress and depression, similar problems that he experienced during his last year of high school. As Leon has sought help for his mental health from university but feels his problem was addressed ineffectively, he decided to leave university and go back home. Leon suddenly left New Zealand without thinking his decision was going to be fully approved by his parents.

Yuyu. He is twenty one years old and was born in Indonesia. Yuyu is a third-year undergraduate, who has neither children nor partner. Although this is his first experience both living and studying in a foreign country, he had some previous international exposure. Yuyu studied in an international school in his own country that promotes learning in an international environment. He believes that studying in an international school equipped him for some of the demands of being an international student, enabling him to develop and improve his English skills. Yuyu, who professes the Catholic faith, mentioned he is not the first in the family to go to university. His parents and siblings live in Indonesia. He lives off-campus in a flat shared with other students.

Jnr Rose. She is twenty four years old from Vanuatu. Jnr Rose is in her last year of study. She is excited about going back to her country after graduation, as she wants to meet her partner and children as well as entering the labour market. She has neither family in New Zealand nor in other countries other than her own home country. Jnr Rose, who is not the first in her family to go to university, was awarded a New Zealand scholarship as part of the New Zealand Aid programme to pursue an undergraduate degree. This financial grant aid helps her pay for her education as well as financially support her family who lives in Vanuatu. She is an international student living on her own for the first time. When Jnr Rose moved to New

Zealand, for a short period she counted on the support of a family member who after graduating from the university left New Zealand. She feels this family member assisted her with the transition and adjustment of being new to a place. Also, although her mother tongue is not English, she feels confident with her English communication skills. Jnr Rose, a Christian person and active church member, lives off-campus and shares a house with other students. She has worked in this country but only for a short period and at the end of her journey as a student in the country.

Lavinia Moala. She has received a New Zealand scholarship as part of the New Zealand Aid programme to fund her undergraduate study. She is a twenty-nine year old student from Tonga and currently in her final year of her degree. Although she learned English in high school, she still struggles with English academic writing. Lavinia Moala had visited New Zealand before starting university in this country, but this is her first experience living in a foreign country. She has a partner and children with whom she moved together to New Zealand as well as other few family members in the country. Her family is always aware of her needs and visits her whenever she needs them, such as the time when she was pregnant. Lavinia Moala lives off-campus in a house with her partner and children. She is a Christian person and active member of a local church. She is not the first in her family to pursue higher education, and some of her family members have experience working or serving as volunteers in foreign countries. This student comes from a traditional style of education in which school teachers have high status in society and not questioning or addressing them in a friendly way is a highly expected behaviour for students to show respect. Coming from a place where questioning is seen as disrespectful of the teacher, it is natural to her to not question and engage in class.

Killa. He is a twenty-eight year old student from Korea and in his final year of university. This is his first experience both living and studying in a foreign country. He came

to New Zealand alone, knowing no one and leaving all his family and friends behind.

Although Killa is a single person with no children, he has previously been in romantic relationships whilst studying at university, and he still sees a relationship in his future. His previous personal experiences includes serving his country in the Military. He is a Christian person who occasionally goes to church. He lives off-campus and is mentally unfit, suffering from stress and depression. Killa feels that at times it is tough dealing with the way he feels. He has abnormal sleep patterns that interfere with his emotional functioning. Killa is a curious person who was always interested in my experience as an international student as well as my opinion and advice on issues related to it, such as how to cope with depression and the pressures university can bring when from overseas.

SM. He is a thirty year old student from France and in his third year of study. This is his second experience as an international student. He is confident about his English communication skills and believes his previous experience living abroad helped equip him to tackle the challenges of being an international student in New Zealand. Before he moved abroad for the first time, he had gained professional work experience in France. He decided to quit his job and relocate overseas in order to move forward with his life, as he considers having international experience helps him in growing both professionally and personally. SM, who is a non-religious person, is a single person and has no children. His family lives in France, and he mentions not having any family member residing in other countries other than his own country. While his family supports him financially, he has a part time job in New Zealand that requires him to work with some international students. His sister and father have visited him in New Zealand, an experience that he highly valued. He lives on-campus, in university accommodation.

Latu. He is a twenty-seven year old student from Tonga. Latu is a final year student who has been awarded a scholarship as part of the New Zealand Aid programme to fund his

undergraduate study in New Zealand. Deciding to live and study in New Zealand required him to leave his country and family for the first time. He is single with no children and has his nuclear family in Tonga. Latu has previous professional studies and experience working with school students in his home country. He enjoys sports, plays rugby, and has a very strong relationship with his parents who constantly monitor what he does in New Zealand. Although his parents do not live with him in the country, he still needs to seek out their permission for any activity he wants to engage in. Also, Latu feels he has an obligation to provide care and support for his aging parents and younger siblings. He thinks he will start performing the tasks involved in caring for them after graduation.

Kim. She is twenty years old and in her second year of study. Before she enrolled at this university, she had been enrolled at another education provider and programme in New Zealand. She changed university and degree programme as her plans and priorities in life also changed. Kim is originally from Vietnam, but has lived in this country for over four years. As her mother is a resident living in the country, she brought Kim as her dependent child. Time after, she was granted New Zealand residence, being considered as a domestic student for tuition fees and enrolment at university. Although she is not formally an international student in New Zealand anymore, she feels her experience as a student is determined by her origins regardless of her current student status at university. While she has her mother in the country, the rest of her family members are in Vietnam. She maintains a good relationship with her parents, but the connection with her mother is stronger, she has a deep admiration for her. Kim is financially dependent on her parents, relying on them to cover most of her expenses, including university costs. She mainly studies but has casual part time jobs that allow her to help her parents cover some of her costs as she does not have any scholarship. She used to live together with her mother but decided moving out on her own to a place closer to the

university campus. She has a boyfriend, no children, and considers herself as a non-religious person.

Paul. He is a twenty-two year old student from England and in his third-year of study. Living and studying in New Zealand is his first experience in a foreign land. After graduating from high school, Paul did not want to pursue tertiary studies but instead have an overseas experience. However, as time passed he found out that he could actually do two things at the same time, moving overseas and pursuing university studies. He was always interested in visiting New Zealand because of its outdoor environments, among other things. Paul lives off-campus in a flat that he shares with other students. He is in New Zealand without his parents or any other family member. Although his family helps towards his living costs and supports his studies in New Zealand, he is keen to work to help fund his education. Paul is currently single, with no children, but has had romantic relationships before and while in university. He considers himself an atheist person and likes team sports; he is an ultimate Frisbee player.

Reo Roy. He is a 26 year old single child from India. Reo Roy lives on-campus in university accommodation, and Hinduism is his religion. He is fluent in English and can hold conversations very confidently. Although socializing comes easily to him, he prefers to spend time alone and have a small number of friends to hang out with sometimes. He is single but aware that in his country most of people of his age are ready to settle down and start a family. Reo Roy mentions having problems with immaturity and lack of confidence. He relies on his parents to pay his tuition fees and cover most of his finances. He also feels his parents are always there for him guiding and protecting him every step of. Since Reo Roy has been in New Zealand, he has started at least three different degrees, as after trying the first two he thought they were not right for him and decided to change them. However, currently he feels he is learning something that he is very passionate about. He loves movies, and he is studying

to work in the movie industry. Reo Roy has never being involved in a romantic relationship but is looking for a partner who is able to support him as his parents do, a woman with a strong character and personality who can help him take decisions.

Themes

The data was examined to identify and report patterned responses within the texts, common themes that help with interpreting the experiences of the students and addressing the research questions. The information obtained from the interviews was grouped into five themes (see Table 6).

Table 6. Distribution of Themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Sense of identity	Mental pictures held about international students
Success	N/A
Intrapersonal characteristics	Demographic attributes
	Self-perceived intelligence level
	Academic orientation
	Identifying and pursuing passions
	Emotional roller coaster
	Prior life experiences
	Pre departure information for overseas study
Interpersonal processes	English language skills
	Background differences
	Family support
	Romantic relationships
	Friendships
University campus environment	University staff members' attitudes
	The scholarship advantage
	Health and wellbeing
	Childcare on campus
	Career support
	Diverse user needs in the library
	Academic support
	Social scene at university
	Campus infrastructure and location
	Teaching and learning

Sense of identity. This theme uncovers qualities that make up the international identity. It provides insights into these students' personal interpretations of what it means to be an international student, aspects of their sense of self.

Mental pictures held about international students. Participants asserted that people hold multiple generalised views or beliefs about international students. There was a shared understanding across these students' perspectives of certain stereotypes and assumptions that are used as principles to define who international students are. This view was exemplified in the comments of JY, who said:

I can remember I was quite scared if I was gonna be accepted. I didn't know if people were gonna be like 'Oh Africa'...scared of how people would perceive me as International...I think it was mental all because I'm from Africa, bit of racism as well...but I came here and it was completely different

Interviewed students listed some of the stereotypical assumptions about international students they believe exist (see Table 7). These assumptions mainly related to students' financial status, goals and priorities, background, behaviour patterns and features, as well as English language level. Moreover, the majority of them (seven) expressed that a common belief is that international students are committed towards their studies or devote most of their time to their studies. Also, the data suggest that there are some stereotypes and assumptions about which these students felt more positively than negatively.

Table 7. Assumptions about International Students

Dimension	Assumption
Means to access to university	International students come from wealthy families International students are able to pay expensive tuition fees
Sense of community	All of them have the same experience with moving overseas
Academically driven	They are very much focused on their studies They perform better academically than home students Their education systems are highly competitive
Cultural background	They usually have an Asian background The closer their cultural background to the host culture, the less challenging their situation They bring a different cultural background and language
Plans/purpose	They wish to settle down in the host country after graduating Alcohol is not a vital part of the social lives of many of them Some students from particular countries are shy
Behaviour patters	International students are lazy They do not get familiar with the place—e.g. addresses and rules They stick to a single group—international or home country community
Wellbeing	They are at a greater disadvantage compared to domestic students They are more stressed than domestic students
English skills	They are not competent students due to their lack of English proficiency Few of them speak better English than others

Another idea attributed to stereotypes and assumptions about international students was in relation to prejudice. These students highlighted the understanding that prejudice influence on how people behave with them. According to their views, the problem is not necessarily what people think about international students but prejudicial beliefs that lead to discrimination. Nine participants asserted that many international students experience discrimination. Since these nine students landed in New Zealand, at least once they have felt discriminated against or heard about cases of discrimination towards international students. They faced discrimination in various ways. For example, they mentioned direct and subtle discrimination, as well as physical and verbal abuse.

there is one guy just come here and say [mm-hm] “leave our country” like “fuck you Chinese” (Leon)

When I was in the street with my ex-girlfriend, some kids, students, some guy and the kids as well, some people threw eggs to us. And also few days ago when I was again in the street, some people threw orange to me (Killa)

Students reported experiencing direct discrimination mainly outside university campus and towards students who have physical features different to Western students. Their reactions to encounters with discrimination were diverse and included emotional stress, ignoring the event, and feeling that being discriminated against is something they have to learn to live with. In few cases, their reactions included informing of the situation to friends or family members. Only two students mentioned reporting the matter to relevant authorities, but none of them believed obtaining effective support from them in addressing the problem.

Another point to note was that the consequences of discrimination could lead to culturally diverse students feeling vulnerable and frightened to engage with local students—Western students—developing a fear of exposure. For example, Leon described that experiencing discrimination outside the university campus led him to see university as a safe place to stay with regard to getting hurt. After facing discrimination, he developed a fear of interacting with local community or experiencing local life beyond university campus.

after these issues, I try to stay at campus because I know the campus is much, much more safer than the outside...very terrible...it's hard to...describe in words, just like your soul, spirit, it's, it's collapsed...So I feel very lonely, helpless [sigh] [pause] yeah sometimes as well as angry...Yeah I think I just stay study here, but people just some people just want to kick you out. [Sigh] terrible. So again, my solution is just to focus on study, forget everything, just focus on the knowledge itself. Terrible

Leon clearly fears engaging beyond university walls, where he feels people can be discriminatory against him and assistance might be difficult. He prefers isolating himself as a means to minimizing the risk of discrimination, and his social life has been affected as a result. The feeling of discrepancy between his desired and actual level of social connection, as well as feeling it is unsafe to be outside, are a source of stress in his life.

In addition, the overview of what defines students as international diverged within the participant group. Their beliefs and perceptions varied in accordance to their own mind-set, background, experience and assumptions. Their conceptions of the status international student included, but were not limited to, visa status and enrolment status. They also emphasized the students' cultural background as well as the struggles they face in the host country. Furthermore, none of the students focused on one single aspect but multiple aspects.

Although their definitions varied, the idea of being different from others was a common feature that stood out in the data. When asked about what defines an international student, there was general agreement among the participants of this study that international students come to a new country, which not necessarily means studying in a country other than the one in which they were born and bringing a culture different to the host culture. For example, in Paulo's view, an international student is "Someone who is not a citizen or a permanent resident of the country". However, for Lavinia Moala, being international could also include being born in the so-called host country, and raised in another: "...a student who was like whether born or [pause] or raised in just a different country and then going to another, another country to stay". In this regard, it was a common belief that students are categorized as international if they leave their home countries and move abroad seeking better educational opportunities or with the specific objective of pursuing higher education. Eight participants held this view.

they are just like me because they had to leave their country to come here to study even their families or closest friends (Jnr Rose)
come to learn the techniques of education that are top in the country...and apply them wherever they are in the world (Reo Roy)

Based on the belief that one of the defining characteristics of being an international student is to come from a different context, four participants commented that adjusting to the new environment is expected of them. Reo Roy supported this idea: "I feel you're coming to a

community that is not yours and becoming a part of that community. That's what international students do". Furthermore, as clearly explained by Latu, international students need to put themselves in a place that feel uncomfortable in order to fit in. Fitting in, as Latu explains, implies doing what other people want in order to be accepted, not necessarily fulfilling your own desires or being as you truly are. She said:

If you don't know how to play like Mm-hm to being, Mm-hm trying to sneak around within the culture then I don't know how do you live as an international student because some of the people they are really good at talking, talking. But the way they talk is not their really reality, but they are trying to move away from their comfort zone to be more uncomfortable. So they will fit in. That's how I describe how international students when they came here

Another aspect is the individual differences associated with cultural background, unique qualities that differentiate international students when compared with each other. It was not directly mentioned during the interviews but it appears as though the sentiments of all participants echoed that not all international students are the same. In line with the idea that international students come from many different cultures, few participants raised the point that whether students come from societies with a similar cultural background to the local culture (Western) as well as have similar physical features and behaviour patterns with local individuals (Western) could affect how they perceive themselves. Participants who held this view believed that sharing these similarities make some international students have a less challenging experience. They are able to develop the feeling that they have a handle on the place, feeling at ease. Paul, an international student from England, succinctly expressed this view, as he said:

there's like a Malaysian club, I'm sure there's a bunch of ones for all kinds of different ethnicities, and I think it's more of a big deal for them because the culture here is so vastly different from what they grew up with...England to New Zealand it's pretty similar, like two English speaking countries, definitely western countries, Mm-hm maybe New Zealand's a bit more Americanised, but it's not enough that I feel sort of ostracised

I guess I don't get viewed as an international student, like quite often people are surprised that I'm paying international fees, they just assume I'm domestic because like I'm an English speaker. New Zealand is essentially just very similar to England

This sentiment was also shared by other students, such as Kim who said: "I don't like to get dark...even my mom says that the sun is not good for the skin...Western people they like the sun, like to get tan, to get dark but I don't like". She also mentioned: "if I make a mistake then they will say 'Oh, Asian driving'...But every, every people can make a mistake right? But 'cause of black hair, feel that I'm one of the Asians, so still foreigner". Lavinia Moala said: "I'm white initially fit in with like the group but when I talk that's when they know I'm not like".

As part of the defining characteristics of international students, four participants also spoke of the need for holding the necessary immigration status. While some underlined that an international student's legal status in the host country is represented by holding a special type of visa, others mentioned the corresponding legal restrictions and conditions associated with this status.

as long as hold a student visa...telling me about that yeah international student (Paulo)

study is the most important thing and then just [unintelligible] then working part time, less than 20 hours a week [laughter] (Kim)

Pay more money...more tuition fee (Leon)

Moreover, when two of the participating students did try to define the term, it was interesting that students' mobility after graduation was brought to the fore. They argued that international students are likely to leave the host country, which not necessarily means returning home, once they finish their studies. This is one of the reasons some of them might feel the need to explore the host country. When asked about what characterizes international students, Reo Roy said: "You contribute to the community that you come or just experience and then come back from where you came from or go somewhere else". Also, Kim

mentioned: "...travelling around New Zealand and try to go...all the restaurants in the area...But I don't do that 'cause I think I'm a resident here so I will stay here longer".

Success. This second theme summarizes the way participants described their own version of success and defined it to fit their needs as well as goals and expectations. Participating students had different goals to drive their own success, and therefore defining success at university turned out to be a tricky and circular proposition as the term seemed to have different meanings to different people. Reo Roy said, "success is subjective, everybody has a different perspective of failure and success". Other students shared his sentiment, for example, Yuyu noted that: "...because of the difference in personality, difference in how people approach things, difference in how people feel about what's around them, I would say success in university...is more related to yourself and how do you feel about your current situation".

A minority of participants (three) held the belief that success is mainly measured by academic achievement, which implies performing well in assignments and assessments as well as obtaining finally a degree. For example, Leon stated: "Academic, academic yeah. There is no other reason because university is a place for studying to achieve a degree. So [laughter] no matter for me or my friends, we can't find another choices". In agreement with this view, two participants emphasized that success is also to do with being able to develop new academic skills. Latu siad: "Like in the past when I came here I start writing, writing, and I couldn't submit and some kind of looking for people to proofread...But come to a time...I say Oh, I can write by myself without giving to anyone to do".

Although a few students highlighted the importance of academic achievement, there was an overall feeling that success includes, but is not limited to, performing well academically.

Many other aspects are important too in helping students to create the right conditions for success, a belief held by most participants (eleven out of twelve). Paul said:

I think focusing on sort of academic things too much could be quite a negative thing. I'm sure it's good in terms of what are your achievements and things like that...but it's not really a full life. You're not really experiencing everything you can get

About half of those eleven students expressed that success involves aspects such as being able to do things at university that bring you a feeling of contentment, a sort of satisfaction or pleasure. Yuyu agreed, stating, "I would define success in university when you are happy with your current situation in uni", and this view was supported by Kim: "you can do whatever you're happy, then it's not really your failure because you do what you're happy". Four students voiced positive attitudes towards exploring new cultures and being able to share the home culture by engaging in interactions with people. They believed in the importance of identifying cultural learning opportunities and stepping into them. One such example of this idea was encapsulated in SM's words: "I'm willing to discover, you know, a new culture and share my culture with others...yeah it's part of the success of university. Because university is also good opportunity to meet also some different people from like lots of different countries and cultures".

Other aspects of success that students expressed included getting involved during their time in university, being able to commit to outside of course work and other academic obligations. Three participants held this view, with Reo Roy stating that, "The student has to go, like, create opportunities for himself and then like use everything that the university has to provide. That's how some students, I've seen some students have succeeded". Also, gaining work experience was appreciated by two participants, with Paulo saying, "students do like, do some part time work besides studying so it's very, it's a kind of motivation like [pause] it trains you for time management". Others held more of a view of success related to exchange

information and ideas among people—networking (three participants). Moreover, only JY directly mentioned success as being able to feel connected to others. In JY’s words, success implies fitting into a group where you have shared interests and spend time sharing emotional experiences, a group that feels like home or a place to belong. The extracts below are examples of such views:

have like a house...I have a flat but it’s not the same because it’s like you just stay there for a semester...but if you have a flat with a friend or two friends then that would be more sense of belonging than having a flat with four, five people ‘cause I just feel it’s not like a real family harmony...having a long term flat as well is like almost having a house (JY)

socialize...‘cause even in terms of like networking you know that you weight how many people you can rely on to how you safe you need at some point to like find a job or find a flat or [pause] talk to someone who is more local (SM)

Intrapersonal characteristics. Based on self-assessments, these students described a range of personal qualities that they think can contribute to enhance the likelihood of achieving goals as well as helping reap the greatest benefits of the university. These qualities include not only inborn traits but also individual preferences and what they have learned and developed through the course of their lives.

Demographics attributes. The data from the interviews revealed some demographic attributes that are potential predictors of international students’ academic and non-academic accomplishments. Participants particularly discussed the impact of age, gender, civil status, religion, and cultural background on their outcomes.

Divergent opinions were voiced over age, and it seems that age diversity in university has both advantages and disadvantages for students. All participants referred to “younger” and “older” students without specifying an age range. Also, while the belief that age has no major impact on university was held by few of them (only two), the majority (ten out of twelve) believes it does. The advantages and disadvantages mentioned were associated with whether

or not students have the capability for coping in academic domains and peer interaction.

Participants believed that learning might be harder as students get older because returning to study after a gap of some years has important challenges. The challenges relate to the difficulty to getting back into the mind-set of studying, which would imply taking responsibility for academic duties, using academic skills as well as remembering foundations you learned while being a school student.

If you stop studying for a certain period and then return to study, I think there will be some issues. It probably will be harder to socialize and study because of your age. Your brain gets rusty and therefore it is difficult to cope with studies (Paulo)

The participants also mentioned the idea that the older students are, the more commitments and less time to dedicating to academic duties they might have. Killa supported this view and said, "...older people usually have more responsibility but they try hard but also more pressure and more stress". Reo Roy expressed his perception in this way: "...I'm almost 30, 30 years old and people of my age are getting married and some of them have kids now back in India". Socializing and engaging with the university community might also be an issue for older students, as they do not share the same social interests than younger students, who are commonly in their early twenties and a majority in university.

she was 30 by the time she took the geology class and at that time...she also feel uncomfortable [mm-hm] being older than everyone else (Yuyu)

most of my class, classmates are much, you know, younger people [pause] I'm [pause] yeah they kind of stay in their circle...Yeah it would probably be age oriented like socializing...if I were roughly the same age as they but I'm not (SM)

Another popular belief was that younger students are more creative when dealing with problems related to university life. However, it was also argued that older students are more mentally and emotionally mature; they have more knowledge as well as experience, advantages that can positively influence their university life.

the elder classmates, they are more, more, planned...and lots of more organized (Leon)

she's very old, and she's 50, and she's close friend in the class for me because she's married, she's very mature and she's polite, and she knows how to behave (Kim)

Some participants mentioned gender. There was a general agreement among participants that being either a female or a male student does not relate to whether international students have capabilities for dealing wisely with academic demands or being good at certain subjects. This was illustrated in Killa's statement: "I think they both are the same. I think they are equal."

Also, JY said, "Everyone I have known, both female and male, have the same chances".

Although participants saw female and male students as equal in terms of capabilities and opportunities, they believed that male and female students have some particular characteristics that differentiate them but not necessarily make them more successful. Eight participants cited differences in aspects such as the level of empowerment in terms of human rights, budgeting skills, academic skills, preferences, as well as the level of effectiveness and maturity. For example, according to Latu, "Most ladies like reading"; also he said, "Women, they are more competitive".

Additionally, it appears that in some subjects a gender gap persists. Three participants turned attention to gender stereotypes in university that reinforce the idea of the existence of male and female subjects. They recognized that some students are vulnerable to stereotype threats that affect their university life by putting them at risk of being hurt by negative experiences such as facing exclusion, as Yuyu mentioned: "A lot of people think that mechanical engineering is only for guys and that's why most of girls go for chemical engineering instead". This view was also supported by Latu who said, "If you go to the education campus, the majority are women". Paul mentioned:

especially in Christchurch because of the there are more guys than girls so imagine girls have much more the courage than guys to deal with, especially in engineering where I think is there are 140 people doing my class probably less than that...and like maybe 20 percent if that is female...So deal with a lot of these guys roaming around and [unintelligible] stuff

Another demographic attribute that emerged from the data was religion, viewed as a defining part of the international student experience. Eight out of twelve students voiced positive attitudes towards religion and expressed to having a religious affiliation. Students mentioned relying on their spiritual and religion beliefs to help accomplish their goals at university, as JY said: “In general my motivations come from my faith”. Also, Killa emphasized on seeking comfort from church members in his attempt to cope with university stress: “...nowadays also I have stress so I decided to go to the church...because church people are usually kind and some people pray, pray, for me”. Others embraced the idea that attending church impacts on other aspects of their university life; they mentioned networking and improving English skills. For example, Killa expressed this sentiment by saying, “I like going to a Kiwi church because I can practice English. All these people speak English. Also if I’m worrying about something I pray and then I feel better. Similarly, in illustrating the role played by the church in social networking Lavinia Moala asserted that “...we do have like BBQ and stuffs like that...it’s yeah a church thing”.

Marital status was also highlighted to have a bearing on students’ university life success. As five participants argued, being single can make a difference while being a university student. This status could bring the benefit of having less pressure and more chances to relax, as well as being able to decide what to do without depending on others agreement. SM expressed his perception in this way: “If wasn’t single I would probably have less time to use for studies”. Yuyu supported this view; he said: “...it matters a lot. If you have a family here, you would have to focus on being with family and doing coursework at the same time”. Additionally, the only two student parents of this study felt that having a partner and children brings both

positive and negative impact to their university life. According to what these students have experienced, you might enjoy your time with family, feeling emotionally supported, but at the same time they demand care and attention that can reduce the available time students have to dedicate to their academic responsibilities.

to look at the bright side [mm-hm] I think that leaving my family back home, I think, it reduces the disturbance that I'd have for my studies with that (Jnr Rose)

I don't think that I have enough time to do my studies like I need to come here more often, study in the library, but...I don't have that much time...as sometimes I say 'it would better if like you guys stayed at home' (Lavinia Moala)

Self-perceived intelligence level. The participants were confident in expressing their views about the concept of intelligence, yet there was some divergence among their views. Intelligence was defined in many different ways to include the capacity to score high in IQ tests, and being capable to express opinions about any topic, and find strategies for having meaningful conversations. The ability to study and remember information quicker and easier, a natural talent for academic things, as well as being able to apply on a daily basis and at university what is learned were also identified as important characteristics of intelligent people. For example, Jnr Rose mused: "Intelligence...to be open to discuss anything...It's like you're open to any person and opinion that might be helpful to you". Although controversies raged over its definition and form of measurement, the majority of participants (nine out of twelve) believed that intelligence is an advantage that puts some students in a favourable or superior position, as Jnr Rose stated, "I think an intelligent person has 80 percent chances to succeed". Paul was very confident to say he is intelligent, a personal characteristic he believed helps him achieve his academic goals:

I consider myself to be quite intelligent, so I feel like I'm going to do things pretty quickly...I've always been the same...like very little effort for decent gains...it certainly makes it easier... I can put a lot less effort into things and get similar results to people who have to put a lot more effort in because they might struggle to understand to begin with and things like that, I don't know.

However, when asked about intelligence, some other participants mentioned that it alone does not necessarily lead to success. Three participants suggested that its positive impact on the chances students have to reach the results they desire for their university life also depends on factors such as hard work, self-determination, competences that facilitate interaction with others, and motivation. These thoughts were encapsulated by JY: “Intelligence can’t itself be all that matters in University. There’ are other aspects that I believe are also mix in, such as social ability and a sense of belonging”. Lavinia Moala supported JY’s view:

it’s hard work that matter, like it’s paid off ‘cause even with like a lot of intelligence and you’re not, you’re not working hard or you’re just skipping class and stuff maybe you do well you, you pass, but...the harder you work that’s, that pays off ‘cause like you have work and you get it happen and I have contacted my tutors and talked and asked questions and stuffs then I still can get good grades

Academic orientation. Participants brought up the topic of being “driven”, academically committed towards their study, as the character trait that could help students get and stay ahead. From their perspective, being driven implies setting goals and working towards them to ensure you meet or exceed expectations. Students saw success as setting yourself up for having a firmness of purpose, the resolve to accomplish goals and carry out tasks with determined results. Their view implied to respond positively to failure and adversity, acting as if success is totally within your control.

in order to success, is more towards your attitude, in terms of like looking forward your future and how you work for it (Paulo)

And that process needs time because...you need time to understand yourself, you need time to understand what’s around you (Yuyu)

a lot of successful Kiwis are also very successful in life because they have the drive to succeed. I mean the sense of purpose that matter (Reo Roy)

Among the qualities of driven students, the participants mentioned the significance of working hard and dedicating time to study not only during the study period but also during study breaks, holidays, and weekends as this would help international students better prepare for assignments and assessments. Yuyu said, “...usually during the holiday I will have self-

study session, just study what I'm interested in. Usually that keeps me motivated in terms of studying". Sylvain agreed with Yuyu and explained: "...I think that requires some like a significant degree of personal work, you can't just rely on the lecturers alone...they can only teach that much in an hour lecture so obviously you need more time to process that and extend your knowledge practice".

Another quality of driven students was communication or being communicative. In a classroom that has a culture of inquiry, students' confidence to ask questions was often mentioned as playing an important role in meaningful learning. Although some participants were aware that in some countries students are not taught to actively engage in class by asking questions, the majority of them (eight out of twelve) called attention to its importance. As questions can help clarify misunderstandings, fill in the gaps or explain something in a better way, asking questions during the lesson or saving them for a designated time was valued by these participants, with Latu believing that, "...if you feel like you don't understand whatever the lecturer says just raise your hand and ask straight...you have to ask. The more you ask the better you are...and if you have problems just stand up and go and...speak up, rather than sitting by yourself and holding that problem inside with you". Also, Jnr Rose said: "...approach my lecturers personally...yeah if I find my assignments a bit difficult". It was mentioned that academic driven students are resourceful and reach out to people for assistance. All of the participants underlined the need for going out of your comfort zone and interacting with people in order to improve your support.

Participants also turned their attention to highlighting how important it is having or developing foundations as well as academic skills. Ten of the twelve were quick to explain that foundations or basic facts are stepping-stones to further study as this helps qualify students for more advanced learning or follow a degree, especially when they are studying something new or have English as a second language.

good foundations like from what I learned previously, in the previous first years...build up strong foundations so that I can understand what's going (Paulo)

I will succeed because of the basics or foundations built in my first two years...it's important that I have the basics, even if they come from high school. So it is because of my basis that I am really understanding well (Jnr Rose)

Ten of twelve participants in the study had strong views on organization. They highlighted the importance of developing a system that allows them to stay on top of all of their obligations. They specifically discussed time management, stating that they believe it matters at university and includes practices such as scheduling time, working early on assignments, waking up early, and balancing course loads by semesters. As JY said, "I'm quite organised and time management is definitely a strong point. However, with my time management, I often fill up my week with so much activity that sometimes I don't have time for myself".

Among the qualities of driven students, while five participants talked about balancing expectations, six of them mentioned motivating yourself as well as being confident, and four highlighted enjoying what you do as part of your university experience. Kim said:

I'm not afraid of anything...everything can be solved...I can do anything but it takes time...And just find, I can find my motivation...I can self-encourage, self-motivate...for example, when I find something that's really hard to do...I just tell myself that, that it's worth doing it something like that...Yeah push myself to do it

Participants mentioned class attendance. All of them regularly attend classes and tutorial sessions, regardless of whether or not attendance is compulsory and how dissatisfied they might feel with class size, teaching strategies, and class content. Leon explained "...as long as the class shows on my timetable I definitely always go there". Interestingly, attendance was not determined by student satisfaction. One of the strong reasons to attend classes regularly was the fear of missing out. Students believed that lecturers can add things in and emphasize important announcements or information, equipping students with resources and ideas of what to be aware of to perform better in assignments and assessments. Paulo

acknowledged "...sometimes the lecturer could write something on the white board which I can't listen". Others were emphatic that absenteeism is not necessarily related to dissatisfaction with the quality of what university offers but the students' lack of responsibility or motivation for what they are doing. Only few students showed negative attitudes towards regular attendance when quality of teaching is low; they stated that in those situations working on your own may be more efficient than going to classes.

the first year. I will describe as like the worst!...[Mm-hm] the only way I can cope is to work in my own (Paulo)

I haven't learned kind of anything from lecturers I think. Just studying by myself and ask friends or from tutors...Even though when I was in class, I didn't understand. So no point to go...until week seven I attended...and then I didn't go (Killa)

When discussing where to go once you finish lectures or academic related activities for the day, study location was mentioned. Although finding a location that is comfortable and meets your needs seems to be key to effective studying, the perfect location for some is not the perfect location for others. While five participants believed that campus libraries are good places to study, a similar number identified other spaces on university campus that can be used as study places, and only a small minority of participants prefer studying at home.

I prefer to come to library because it is quiet to work on my assignments (Paulo)

I feel more comfortable in my room (Jnr Rose)

Engineering building...the new building, it's very fancy. I mean the computer room has very powerful computer (Leon)

Identifying and pursuing passions. Personal interest as well as contextual aspects that surround students, such as family as well as both home and host country's needs and characteristics, seem to have significant influence on the process of choosing a career path. Eight interviewed students shared how they chose their career and how they feel about their career. They described whether their career choice matches their preferences, interests and ambitions, as well as whether they feel engaged in activities that utilize their abilities. Four

participants expressed pursuing studies that are aligned to their personal interests and preferences, with Reo Roy expressing his satisfaction and certainty about his career choice in this statement: “I’m quite actually liking what I’m studying. I mean there’s no like psychological burden or anything like that with this thing...I mean I like going to the movies so much. It’s, it’s an addiction...addiction that I’m very proud of...it’s related to what I’m doing now and it’s, it has a very therapeutic like [mm-hm] effect on me”. Paul also expressed his interest and motivation for pursuing his field of study, and this was illustrated in his statement: “the main thing that guided me to engineering was that I’ve got a reasonable amount of natural ability in maths and physics and so it was always like, well, engineering was the fairly logical choice there...It was just sort of the choice that I made when I was like ‘oh well I’m gonna go to uni, what should I study, well this fits’ I guess”. However, the career choice of some other participants was not necessarily related to what they really want or think is right for them.

Family was mentioned in terms of intentionally pushing students toward a particular career path. This was captured by Latu, who elucidated: “When I was in high school and I was about to my career, I was thinking become a my career was a rugby person...My dad, all of our family [laughter]...My dad said No, no, no”. Leon supported this view and said: “I started the singing [mm-hm] since 10 years old. Yeah I loved singing...and for developing singing skills also I spent a lot of time on...playing the piano...and learned some musical theory. At the high school, in order to have more time to study the music, I chose the history as my major...But, I didn’t get fully support from my parents”. Although Latu and Leon were clearly supported by their family in their decisions to pursue studies in a foreign country, neither of them chose their own majors. It seems like their family dictated what they should do instead of helping them find viable paths.

It was not directly mentioned, but it seems that family experience of higher education was key when it came to how participants in this study decided what to study, where to study and, indeed, whether they chose to study at all once finishing their school years. While nine out of twelve participants said that at least one of their parents as well as siblings have university experience, three of them have only parents with university experience. Two participants are the first in their family to go to university.

The other aspect that appears to influence the choice of international students' career decisions is home country and host country demands. Some students expressed clear views about it and argued that international students might have different ideas about the meaning of a specific career and the value that should be placed on it, depending on the country they come from or decide to settle in. They raised the point that society influences judgement and decision-making. Leon shared his view and said: "So what should I do if I keep on studying then history, I won't have a god job in China". Also, Kim explained how being granted residence in New Zealand led to change her plans in terms of career:

before I had to choose accounting because it's like I had to choose either accounting or nurse to be like, to be in the skill for to, to be able, like I heard that it's easy to find a job in accounting...So either I had to choose accounting or nurse to stay here and work here...and then I chose accounting but now...I had to choose what New Zealand government prefers, but now I have the choice to choose what I like so yeah

Supporting this line of thought, Reo Roy commented on cultural influences on career choice and added: "because what Indian society is like... 'Hey, why are you studying Arts?' 'What would that'...actually, not just from India... 'Hey what will arts give you in terms of jobs?' 'There's no jobs out there'. Who cares if there's no job, I like to study it because is therapeutic".

Emotional roller coaster. Further to the views described previously was the individual examination of feelings and emotions. Participants looked into their emotional

state and its influence on how they function academically and socially in their university lives. They mentioned experiencing a wave of different emotions throughout their university years and it seems that their responses to the different feelings experienced influence their behaviour and how well they perceive themselves to cope with their university life. Also, regulating emotions appeared to be more difficult for some of them than others. Although some participants felt that the university is academically more challenging and demands much more effort than what it does for others, all of them explained that at times they have trouble keeping up and staying on top of university life—keeping track or being in control of. They described some difficult feelings and behaviours associated with mental health issues.

Feeling of burden as a result of rigorous academic regime, difficulty level of their courses and overload, appear to be a common problem for most of them (11 out of 12) and manifests itself in many different ways. When answering how they are currently feeling, these students often used words such as “stressed”, “busy”, “nervous”, “anxious”, “worried” and “tense”.

Yet four of them described feeling confident and three felt excited about learning. For example, Paulo expressed: “At the moment I feel, I feel a little bit of tension, because maybe this is new year for me into a professional engineering year. So it’s like quite a lot of things that are different compared to what I learned at intermediate year”. Killa described her feelings as, “I think these days, nowadays, I feel a little bit nervous and worried about my future ‘cause I’m going to graduate soon... so for the yeah the future because yeah nowadays and also worried about my study and lectures...is quite, was hard. So actually a little bit nervous. I have, because I have to pass and have to be success”. Paulo and Killa gave two examples of stress triggered by excessive worrying about performing well academically. They brought to the fore that as students progress through university and take more advanced subjects, the increased difficulty may cause stress for them.

Expanding on these views was also the concern that some students face sleep problems due to their academic pressure or demands. Two participants described that suffering from a poor sleep quality is a problem that impacts on their daily life, academic functioning as well as quality of life—performing tasks that require additional energy is more challenging.

nowadays I have suffered from insomnia...and [pause] because I can't, I can't sleep you know so when I study I can't focus (Killa)

I was sitting down, I didn't sleep the whole night. And during the day, I didn't go out to my room, even I didn't eat, I just drink water, I'm just sleeping, I didn't do anything else, sleeping in the bed, go down to the floor, sleeping in the floor...I don't feel like mm-hm...motivated (Latu)

On the contrary, at least six participants described positive views towards the academic efforts that being a university student demands. These students referred to the rewards of studying at university, explaining that they have been more than worth it. For them, motivation derives from becoming final year students, knowing that graduation was fast approaching, and thus the excitement of preparing to embark on the next chapter of their lives (post-graduation planning). Some of them mentioned returning home to see family members and entering the workforce (applying for positions that meet their qualifications and skills).

Jnr Rose described her sentiment as follows:

I'm feeling excited like just can't wait to finish the year because it's my final year...yeah happy and excited for this...because I know I'll be going home and be there with my family and my kids yeah [mm-hm] and my husband. So I know that there if this year ends a great thing that I will enjoy and have at the end of this year...feel good that I'm going home to see my family, speak with my family and get the job

Loneliness is also one of those challenging feelings that international students need to overcome. Four participants reported experiencing a perceived sense of isolation or empty disconnection described in terms of physical and emotional distance from friends that is difficult for them to cope with. Although people have physically surrounded them throughout their university life, there are several moments when they feel disconnected due to a lack of intimate and emotional bonds with people. This was captured in Leon's words: "Feeling quite

lonely...all of us have the same problem...but we can't solve it...nobody listen to us and...local students, have, some, like have zero interest on our background". Also, Jnr Rose described her sentiment and said: "...I looked around and I see every white people and like no very, uncommon to where I come from. So yeah and the many thousands so like hundreds of people in one classroom and all these things just made me feel so I just feel so small here...Yeah I just feel like sometimes it comes to my mind that I just want to go home". Leon and Jnr Rose described a clear scenario of students feeling isolated despite being surrounded by peers and as a result of having poor intimate connections. This feeling can have serious consequences for students' mental health, as they might feel neglected or put aside. In the case of Paul, although he has plenty opportunities to interact with different people, sometimes he prefers to engage with only few of them and develop deeper connections: "He's probably the only person in New Zealand I got friendship like at the same kind of level I do with some people back in England". He also said:

I don't know we use the word like laddish...because that like for the boys mentality...but like loud, crap, really annoys me like most of them I try to avoid dealing with because I just think they are idiots...I don't really bother anyone else...than it's just loud and arrogant and annoying...I'm just trying to avoid them if they are there so whatever...I meant most, most of them are not really bad people, they are just annoying to me

No matter what their expectations, almost all the interviewees encountered many obstacles during the transition to university life in a foreign land. They described having difficulties in adjusting socially and emotionally, especially during early stages of their university life. Leaving home to attend university miles away from home was an important milestone for these students, although the transition has been challenging for many of them who face discomfort and distress in several areas. Participants shared the belief that adjusting to a new life phase as students in a foreign country is difficult and evokes different feelings, as this situation forces them to make changes in their lives. For example, five mentioned finding everything unfamiliar due to the different degrees of differentness between the host culture

and that of their home country. Yet, as time went by, these students became more familiar with the host culture, and thus the level of discomfort they were initially challenged with upon entering the host country decreased. They started to maintain a better emotional equilibrium facilitated by a process of adaptation, which led them to a state of well-being in which they started feeling able to cope with some aspects of life in the new country. JY shared his view stating, “Now I feel way better than last year when I first came ‘cause I kind of understand the culture, understand the people, understand the city. I’ve been around NZ a bit so now it’s like it’s a little bit more homey...probably took me a semester...probably say eight months”.

Students talked about a sense of accomplishment that they linked to happiness and student satisfaction. Accomplishment was viewed as the actions taken, based on individual priorities and plans for university, and what you gain or those results that came from them. They expressed feeling a sense of satisfaction that comes from little successes, any events and achievements that give them a sense of pride. Although all of them reported feeling a certain sense of accomplishment at university, some of them felt less accomplished than others as they believed they could have done more or things differently.

I satisfy but I don’t think I’m really, really, satisfy...I could’ve done better. But I’m quite happy with myself, with the thing I would, like having a baby and having school work... I could like just work a bit more harder, work like done before time and something like that...Yeah, I’m still good, still alright...Still passed...I wish I could’ve done better sometimes (Lavinia Moala)

Prior life experiences. Most participants (ten) reflected the understanding that international students build on competencies or abilities to complete specific tasks developed through different experiences as they progress through life. When describing how ready they thought they were for the demands of being an international student, eight participants believed were somehow ready. Although some of these participants felt readier than others

did, all of them were confident about some of their skills to cope with certain aspects of their experience as international students or to achieve certain goals, being challenged in ways that maybe they never even thought about. This view was evident from JY's interview: "I was ready for the things I could control. I managed the things I could in terms of flights, accommodation, fees, bank accounts etc. However, I don't think I was prepared for the aspect of being away from home and really having to find my own way in many aspects, as well as making new friends and losing some as well". Supporting this view, Reo Roy said, "I have never been sure about my technical expertise but as far as my creativity is concerned I'm pretty sure I can do pretty well". JY's and Reo Roy's statements showed the different perceived readiness levels among participants for living and studying overseas.

School seems to play a critical role in helping students prepare for university and nine students voiced positive attitudes towards their school years. JY noted that: "I think the school I went to was a great bonus in Zimbabwe. We had constant seminars and talks about University life and building skills and habits that would help us cope with the transition". In addition, five students emphasized how important it is to have other previous academic experiences such as professional trainings or higher education studies; these experiences equip students for university with academic foundations and skills, such as English language and academic writing skills, self-discipline, note taking and time management skills. For example, SM alluded that "...what I studied in Australia was also kind of useful because it was also to do with [mm-hm] engineering. And my first studies and after high school in France, I don't know, were like 3d graphics and stuff like that so for [pause] like kind of drawings and stuff like that is also useful".

Previous work experience was also seen as a valuable learning opportunity that gives students useful skills and knowledge for university. This view was an aspect brought up by four participants, with SM expressing: "I was a freelancer, basically I was running my own

business...that experience kind of taught me how to be independent...and like manage my timetable, you know, your budget and all of that yeah”.

Two participants pointed out the benefit of having the previous opportunity of living abroad. In their opinion, this experience helps develop an idea of how it is living in a foreign country, with JY commenting: “I had never left Africa for this long on my own before. And my uncle invited me to England to spend some time with him there...before coming here. I think it really helped because I kind of had an idea of an efficient bus system and had an idea of what to expect with reduced the culture shock massively”. JY’s statement captured the idea that past traveling experiences might give students some confidence about what to expect. These experiences would expose them to new experiences that they had probably not ever experienced before or a new life style they never expected to have, showing them a different side to life, and thus teaching them to live outside of their comfort zone. It seems as though moving out of the comfort zone of your home country facilitates learning about both a new environment and about yourself, forging an ability to adapt, overcoming challenges, and embracing new experiences or culture.

Pre departure information for overseas study. Participants, who arrived at university with many different levels of preparation, discussed the importance of having prior information on the chosen study programme as well as on how university functions. Three of them mentioned that before commencing their current university studies they had neither enough information regarding the level of difficulty in attaining their degree (assessment, workload and course content) nor information about the way university works. In contrast, six of them believed they had some information regarding university but this information was not necessarily provided directly by the university. Their main sources of information were friends, family members, previous first-hand experience of university life, and agencies approved by university to help future students. Paulo said, “...I do have enough information.

I would say still enough, but it's the information that I got it from somebody else or I did my own research but no from the university...Just tried [pause] the friends that like tell what's the topic that they will teach, what is involved so I will just search in the net like looking more details about that". Further to this view was the perception that in some cases the way they obtained information contributed to an increased risk of having misleading, incomplete or incorrect information. As Leon explained in the following statement:

after I came here, I realized these problems...because before I came here the only resource I can receive is from the.....the Agency...and the website...But the website, you know, most of them are advertisement...it's impossible for advertisement discuss about disadvantages [laughter] of university, only discusses about advantages...I also read some students portfolio...but they also give only positive feedback...no idea about the negative things

English language skills. All participants agreed that English language is central to their experience as students, although they acknowledged that proficiency in this language is one of the most recurring tensions for international students. Eight out of twelve participants believed they have a level of English that enables them to live and study in New Zealand and cope with most of the demands that brings. The situation was different for the rest of them, who struggle with English. The impact of participants' struggles with English on their university life was described mainly in terms of both having difficulties to socially engage and perform well academically. They felt they have to work harder than other students do in order to succeed in those two things. For example, Leon described his problems with understanding lectures: "...I will just like a copy machine in the...classroom...So I just...write everything but I cannot understand...what he or she talks about". Furthermore, due to their struggles with English, some international students lack confidence to engage in class as well as problems to understand course materials, as Killa expressed: "usually international students...don't ask questions in the class" and then "...you read the articles slow...to understand". Some students face problems when it comes to completing

assignments adequately. They put ideas down in written form but might feel dissatisfied with what they have written to the point where they turn in an assignment that is poorly completed. Students' struggles with English also affect their confidence in their ability to do group work and succeed in that, as clearly illustrated by Leon:

sometimes the sentences just don't make sense. I still remember that I spent like the whole night writing a passage...but at the next day...my team member changed it everything... 'cause my English...is little bit weird for them...terrible...it's really sad, it was really, really, sad

English language proficiency also influence students' social life by determining whether they will have troubles connecting with people. One such example was encapsulated in Killa's words: "I want to make a Kiwi friend...but sometimes don't have confidence, so it's hard to approach to them". Killa explained that international students might find it hard to befriend local or native English speakers; he also said that language is one of those barriers to blame for difficulties making friends. Paul, who is a native English speaker, said that some other native speakers: "...as soon as they hear a foreign accent they immediately try to find a way out of the conversation".

Five participants highlighted that the university states its English language requirement in tests, assessing students' ability to communicate in English across all language skills for individuals who expect to study where English is the means of communication. They were aware that the required English test scores are higher for some courses than what they are for others. However, as emphasized by two of them, standardized English language tests really do not measure whether international students will have major issues communicating in English once in the host country. As underlined by SM, English tests only focus on academic English; he said: "if you pass it you're considered good enough to [opening bag] to follow the, you know, studies in English...passing the test doesn't necessarily mean, you know, follow the studies...Yeah the thing is the IELTS is, they have to kind of certify you have a

minimum level of English...but is a very [pause] [mm-hm] kind of academic English that, it's not really everyday English”.

Some students are more resilient than others. For example, two participants raised the point that the ability to communicate with English speaking people can be developed over time through practice, as Leon said: “Although at the beginning you may not fitting the speed of the lecturer, but after a period, you mind find awe my ears become clever”. This view was supported by SM who believed that “your level improves even though you, you don't feel like you're doing anything to, to improve, it is kind of moved forward I think”.

As revealed by two participants, international students are not necessarily ready to deal with different accents and local slangs in daily life interactions. At times they struggle to cope with new expressions for common objects as well as emotions. They have problems with words or phrases that have infused into everyday communication, especially used in informal settings and among certain groups of students. Apparently, slang serves an important function in students' interaction, despite how much it may confuse some international students. In addition, the type of pronunciation unique to some English speakers is a challenge for some students too. This was made explicit in Leon's statements: “I speak English is basically from the text book...relative official, nothing too fancy...When the domestic students communicate to each other, they use a lot of slang...not very clear words...and their own tone, accent”. He also said: “...the local world has more slang...and their English is more casual...than our professors...have really changed the pronunciation of the English, so I can't gather what word, what's the meaning of that”.

Background differences. Students described and examined some of the differences between New Zealand and their home countries in an effort to share how those differences impact on their abilities to cope with their lives as international students. They revealed that

international students' perception of these differences can affect their adjustments to university and the way they respond to change. What emerged from this qualitative data was that the less control these students feel they have due to differences they encounter, the less change, challenge, and uncertainty they might feel could handle. Participants implicitly agreed that finding out that there are many differences to cope with impacts on the degree of control international students feel they have in the challenging situation of living alone and studying overseas, in many cases for the first time. The predominant differences that emerged from this research data were in aspects such as model for education, food, cultural values, population and country beauty. According to them, home and host country differences influence the individual's decision-making related to the approach to take to their university experience. They felt that cultural differences as well as other differences that go beyond culture and cover other unique characteristics impact on the students' participation behaviours, communication styles, learning strategies, and social behaviours.

One of the most mentioned perceived differences between countries was in the model for education-approaches to teaching and learning. Seven participants shared their views on teaching and learning and expressed that some international students have been taught to think critically, explore, and be creative, actively participate in class, and address lecturers and seniors in a friendly manner (a relaxed, non-restrictive or non-competitive education system). However, there are also international students who come from societies with other cultural norms and accepted patterns of behaviour that influence their classroom performance. As they mentioned, some students come from societies that promote an educational system with domineering lecturers that discourage open questioning and friendly relationships. They focus on memorization, studying as well as standardized testing rather than exploring and questioning, which limits creativity. According to what these participants have experienced, these international students might find it challenging to engage in a new

environment that openly calls for a high order of thinking and close lecturer-student relationships. They might face a range of challenges to actively and skilfully conceptualize, apply, analyze or evaluate information, and thus have difficulties understanding lectures, participate in class, and working on academic duties individually or in groups. In addition, they might struggle to build a strong lecturer-student relationship based on friendly interactional patterns, considered unacceptable or inadequate in their countries—opposition between traditional and liberal contexts.

like schooling at home, and it's, a, in another way that educates like studying style is very different...we just like listen to the teachers and stuffs and taking their opinions and stuff. It's like just normal but coming here it's like very different for myself and decide for myself what's true and not true (Lavinia Moala)

we just study theory and just try to remember everything...But it's not like that here...we don't have to remember all the theory...we just need to understand but we need to really have a deep understanding (Kim)

One aspect that caught the attention of some participants was the amount of effort that students from different cultural backgrounds are taught they should put into studying or academic duties. Six of them pointed out that how competitive and hardworking students are expected to be vary based on their cultural background. From a studying perspective, they felt that there are countries that embrace a more laid back and lax attitude than others. In their views, this attitude enables students to behave in a calm relaxed way as if nothing will ever worry them, and thus dedicate time to other important things in their lives. Some students expressed these views as outlined in the statements below:

Chinese education is...too strict and sometimes is cruel and...Yes, little bit bloody too competitive...it's not enjoy for kids to study...outcomes in Chinese education is good, but it's not a way to grow up a person (Leon)

New Zealand has just want to verify if you get the skill you have to, [mm-hm] but China, Chinese exam wants to verify who is the genius...much more difficult (Leon)

if this admission had not happened I would have actually gone to Indianapolis I guess. Oh God! I don't know what could have happened if I would have ended up going there...the academic curriculum out there is completely different from the academic curriculum in New Zealand...they are more strict...It's a, it's a pretty slow...[Mm-hm] like relax lifestyle out here (Reo Roy)

It was provocative to notice that the differences in the approach to education between countries can be a point of conflict with some international students when learning about subjects integrated in the curriculum but forbidden in their home countries based on religious beliefs or morals. As indicated by Lavinia Moala, learning about these subjects or topics might make some of these students feel uncomfortable as they can be against their morals. Therefore, students might feel at a crossroad between should and must, not knowing how to break through it. On the one hand, refusing to work on assignments that conflict with personal morals can generate anxiety for them as that would limit their grades. On the other hand, taking the assignments can be an internal struggle as these students might need to work on a topic that clashes with their values. These students find themselves in a conundrum when it comes to discussing these topics, feeling emotionally unequipped to deal with them. They might decide not to share their concerns about these topics with family or people from their home community as it is expected of these people to find it uncomfortable to discuss what is thought of as sensitive societal topics that should be avoided in open communication as they can create tension. Lavinia Moala openly expressed this sentiment saying: "There's like a conflict in, doesn't suit really well...It's not it's not good...I don't know what to believe...it really confuses me a lot and it has affected my study. Sometimes I don't really like when...do my assignments and stuffs because it makes me like diving in those little topics and then like I don't feel like really happy about it. And when I go home and talk about it, it's not a happy subject, causes conflict with whom I'll ever talk to [laughter]. So yeah, and then also influences my attitude towards church...so yeah there's a conflict there".

Another aspect identified was that countries differ in their support options available for international students aimed at helping them overcome the unique challenges of studying in a place other than their own country. Leon highlighted the importance of having a holistic approach that cares about different aspects of the student development rather than only the academic aspect. He expressed this sentiment saying:

if a foreigner student...comes to a Chinese uni, so what will happen? How we treat him?...[Mm-hm] we will provide the free, free travel...and better, better accommodating...some lots of extra help...Also, Chinese girls like foreigners [laughter]...But why me come to Canterbury, How do they treat me? Just study...and I pay a lot of money...like four times than domestic students...I expect to have better [laughter] service...like bring us to travel...I don't expect a better accommodation or like extra help or all like the Kiwi girls love me [laughter]. But also want some better, better state

...studied in China...and he told me he felt like first class citizen in China. Every Chinese people just helped him and yeah...Little bit upset. Yeah, upset

Leon expressed frustration as his expectations for university life were not met. What he expected was beyond the academic arena and included comprehensive support services or diversity in provision of students support services, which he believes could have made it easier for him to achieve his goals as a university student. Thinking as an education consumer and paying high fees, he expected a better student experience. He does compare the facilities and services available to him as an international student in New Zealand to the best services he has ever received—relative to that of his home country. What he expected was in relation to services but also people's attitudes.

Another most mentioned difference between countries was in food. Eight participants brought up the topic of food and the differences they identify between countries in terms of quality, price, and availability of international food and ingredients. For many international students, it is a struggle to find the food they grew up with while they study overseas, far away from their home country. Some traditional spices and ingredients commonly used in their home

countries are not readily available or are expensive, being difficult for students to cook their own meals. These views are explained in the following statements:

Back at home like 80 percent of the food is organic...you can just go and pick up any fruit from the trees...here you have to pay...and it's quite expensive (Jnr Rose said)

there's a lot of food available in my home country. Yeah, and it's quite cheap like...I can eat out very often unlike here it's quite expensive (Paulo)

is like back in Indonesia I know that there are good food everywhere...I know this food will taste better (Yuyu)

curries are so expensive in Christchurch...20 dollars a curry, which is practically more like, I mean, that's like 1000 rupees. And in India you get curries for like 200 rupees. So I'm spending almost 5 times as more for Indian food out here (Reo Roy)

It is fine just like there's certain ingredients like can't get in here (Paulo)

Concerning food, a common aspect mentioned by all the participants was changes in eating habits. Participants described their dietary habits when asked about similarities and differences between their current food practices and their practices before moving to New Zealand. Leaving the family home as well as assuming full responsibility for purchasing and preparing food affected dietary habits in this group of students. All of them have developed some levels of change in their eating habits and although all of them try to prepare their own daily meals, the frequency varies.

I buy usually food from the Cafeteria...I know how to cook but [pause] I don't want to cook...Sometimes I cook at night...when I cook it takes time actually and after I have to wash the dishes everything and I feel tired [laughter] (Killa)

back at home...we provide our food...from the farm...and we do our traditional cooking, but here just like eat a lot of rice. Compared at home rice is just morning breakfast, so at home a morning breakfast is become like lets say three meals...when I eat it is tasteless for me and makes me really hungry...makes me feel like lazy...don't have the energy and the power within me to do the study (Latu)

The third most mentioned difference between countries was in cultural values. Five participants turned attention to the notions of individualism and collectivism. They looked at differences between collectivist and individualistic cultures and the way they differ and

influence behaviour. These students pointed out that in collectivist societies in-group norms shape behaviours, being the reason why some students identify with and work well in groups. In individualistic cultures, personal goals dominate in-group goals, which may explain some students' lack of interest in engaging with other students. They believed that being individualistic, in some cases referred to as being independent, brings both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, it affects interpersonal relationships as it does not allow students from different cultural backgrounds to interact, engage, build networks, and develop a sense of community. On the other hand, it also allows students to act freely and more independently without feeling there is a society or group judging them.

in New Zealand is more individualistic. It's just we just focus on our job, our roles and what we, what we should do, we need to do that...in Vietnam is like collectivism culture. We try to help everyone out [laughter] we don't focus on our job first...but we have to help everyone out first (Kim)

here people are quite independent...when they need help and that time only they ask, but usually they don't study together...I study with usually with Chinese and international students...Korean people are more social, I mean stick together (Killa)

Five participants described differences in terms of cities' populations. They mentioned that some international students are used to living in a large metropolis, coming from large and busy places that are known for being exceptionally crowded. They depicted these cities' residents doing everything from walking down the street to sitting in traffic. These participants felt that moving from a large metropolis to smaller or vice versa, students might find it more challenging to adjust than those who have been brought up there. Yuyu's view was explicit in his statements:

in big cities in general...because there are so many people there and they are all like busy [pause] [mm-hm] there's just some sort of like [pause] how do I phrase it? I don't know maybe because I live in a neighbourhood where there are a lot of students, but usually here [mm-hm] sometimes people say randomly say 'hi' or it's very easy for us to just turn around to strangers and stuff whereas back in Indonesia, because there are so many people, they don't really put much attention to others

the more population you have, usually the busier the city is and it sort of make sense because people get busy, they don't really, they have to focus on their stuff anyways. Whereas in here, because it's sort of a student city, most of them are students anyways. That's why I think it's a little bit different...But I don't miss that part of my hometown

A perceived destination's beauty seems to be one of those factors influencing undergraduate decisions to choose a destination to study, and thus makes a difference in their university life.

Five participants mentioned differences in natural characteristics—geography and environment—emphasizing differences in their perceived natural beauty and environmental conditions.

New Zealand is such a beautiful place to be in...The weather is so nice...is just a nice place to be...what I'll miss most is like just taking walks, walks in like Hagley Park...we have those big areas just to go lay down and read about, and just to relax (Lavinia Moala)

pollution, air pollution [laughter]...so once I go home, I said 'Oh, Goodness fresh air'...I don't miss that... 'cause we just focus on developing our economy and the, and they set the environment in the least priority (Leon)

I would say that the environment in New Zealand is very good...There are beauties, sceneries...yeah for me to travel during my holiday breaks...to like relax (Paulo)

Killa, Leon, Latu and Reo Roy highlighted society beliefs in terms of the opportunities as well as benefits of studying in a foreign country, which relate to chances to succeed professionally and an opportunity to bring back home knowledge to help community develop.

The least mentioned differences were in social life, customary rules, safety, and transportation. Regarding social life, three participants shared their views on their interpersonal relationships, emphasizing the differences in the way students from different backgrounds engage with others through the things they do for fun. For example, the act of drinking was viewed as a means of communication and interaction between some university students, normalized as an essential part of social relations between them. However, the drinking culture shocks some international students as they hold negative views of practices associated with the consumption of alcoholic beverages.

I'm not so good as locals in terms of going to pubs and socialize...having drinking every weekend like for three nights each week... For me is like one point is like alcohol is not cheap like they use to buy a lot and drink. And for me another point is like I need to catch up with my study (Paulo)

I sort of grab a beer and that's it...they have a culture of just drink a lot and when you do anything, when you hang out just drink [mm-hm]. It's really different in the one in Indonesia because the group I'm with in Indonesia they don't really drink...It's quite a shock for me (Yuyu)

Two participants discussed differences in businesses opening times. They seemed to enjoy more when most major business have extended opening hours instead of restricted hours.

Paulo stated: "It's quite a big difference like, for example, it would be like the shopping Malls...like the cafes...like in New Zealand they close like normal office hours like 5 pm...but in like my home country like they still like keep operating until late night because like other people they like work, just finish work and then go for a meal".

Further to these views was the perception that transportation is one of the key ingredients in enhancing the student experience as this facilitates interactions through reducing commuting time. One participant mentioned the traffic congestion caused by the large number of vehicles in big cities. Also, two participants expressed their preference for a public transportation that can be used to go everywhere, working throughout most of the country, while one participant felt that private transportation is beneficial for students as it makes many places more accessible.

for New Zealand...if I want to travel to a place like it's like, and not saying that the city buses, it's like those that can bring you to far a bit...so that's a bit of problem. And if I want to go to like go for holidays by myself in New Zealand like I have no choice, but do I have to rent a car to travel easily (Paulo)

definitely should by a car...very useful when you want to do something. When you want to take a break...or when you feel sick, you drive and you go to the clinic or the specialist...movie theatre, I can do a lot of things, or part time...but if you don't have a car is kind of very boring, kind of very angry...I really regret that I haven't bought a car (Killa)

Lavinia Moala focused on customary rules and clothing. She expressed her feelings by saying: "...at home...we don't like seeing people with [mm-hm] shorts ...when we go to school, yeah, we have to cover our body...we wear uniform...when we stay at home, everywhere, there are people that like wear shorts and stuff but it's not respectful. So when I came to uni and I see people wearing clothes like that in university...I was really shocked". Paulo mentioned differences in safety offered to international people, expressing: "...New Zealand is a safe country...It's alright for me to like walk along during the midnight...I can't do that back home. It's too dangerous".

Interpersonal processes. This theme consists of participants' perspectives of their social networks, their ability to engage and get along with others, social relationships that can help fulfill needs for social interaction as well as emotional belonging. This group of international students particularly noted interpersonal relationships with family, romantic partners, and friends, focusing the discussion on what determines those relationships and their effects of having them.

Family support. There is an emotional connection with family, and participants seemed to care about the support they receive from them. For these international students, the outcomes of family support mainly related to academic achievement, as that is what their family believe to be important. Also, most of them (ten) mentioned having family members in their home country and only two mentioned to have family in both their own country and New Zealand. Although during the interviews all of them mainly highlighted the support provided by parents, six mentioned other family members too, such as siblings, cousins, husband and children.

The reasons given for the positive views towards family varied but two reasons that stood out across all participants were the appreciation for the emotional and financial support that they

provide. While nine stressed both financial and emotional support, three talked about emotional support only.

my dad has paid my fees already...and my insurance for university....because I'm the only child so they are always emotionally supporting me (Reo Roy)

some of the things that might not make me happy during the week is when...I want to get in touch with my family back at home...but sometimes I can't...we feel more comfortable or something when we get connected with our families (Jnr Rose)

Furthermore, the majority of them (ten out of twelve) believed that their plans and final decision of going to university, seeking out for educational opportunities overseas, was entirely supported by their family members—mainly nuclear family. The support included encouragement and financial help to further educational studies. Lavinia Moala said: "...the big part is why they want me to go to experience like 'you should go, you should go to experience'...I think it was a decision with my family. When I came, my husband stopped working to come here with me".

However, two participants also brought up the topic of the negative influence of family on their emotional state. Two of them emphasized the stress that family, mainly parents, and their expectations for students' academic attainment and achievement can put on students. Family can push students to focus on academic responsibilities and studying hard. Further, sometimes they have expectations over which students may not have control. Although students perform to the best of their ability, they still may not meet their parents' expectations:

my mother expects me to study a lot...when she asks me 'Do you study hard?' and then [sigh] I don't study actually very hard. So when I say 'yes I study hard', I feel guilty (Killa)

under stress a little bit because normally is from my like academic result. Also, my parents also care about that. My intermediate year's result is pretty bad and yeah and they are not satisfied (Leon)

The only two students who are parents in this study felt that having a partner and children can result in struggle to achieve study-life balance, creating a tension between their duties at university and other important things in their lives. However, having family members, such as parents or siblings available and keen on taking care of children, is a relief that allows time to focus on university:

two of my sister actually came here to New Zealand to take care of me when I was pregnant...And then my brother is in Queenstown, so he always helps me out when we first came...My husband... support as well...His mom spent six months here with me before I have a babe because I had pregnant and I couldn't eat New Zealand food...His mom came with a lot of ... food and...cook for me. And then...his nephew came over with a lot of Indian food

Lavinia Moala suggested that as school-aged children interact with peers, they enhance their parents' chances to improve their social life by interacting with other parents. She said: "We are quite close...in our block and our children always going...Nice kids always come in and knock the door, and 'Do you want to play?'...my daughter always go and ask".

Romantic relationships. Nine students shared their views on being in a romantic relationship while at university. They had divergent opinions on the perceived benefits and costs that a romantic relationship would entail for them. Among the students who considered the negative side of being involved in a romantic relationship, the main aspects mentioned were lack of available time that could be fully dedicated to study, followed by increased financial hardship. For example, Yuyu said: "Being singles I would say give you a lot of advantage 'cause you can just do whatever you want, yeah you have things that you worry about but most of the time you don't have that responsibility of having to do something for someone else". Relationship agreements in which partners commit to certain behaviours might work and set the tone for the relationship, as Yuyu explained in the following statement: "...every time they want to study they just spend [mm-hm] their time alone. So they sort of already said to each other like if I really want to study don't disturb me". Yuyu

stressed that in every loving relationship there is a compromise where you give up one thing in order to get something else that you also desire—trading time for support: “I’m not sure having a boyfriend or a girlfriend or a boyfriend will mean but some of my friends say it’s sort of a trade-off. You sometimes you feel more secure, more, you have like extra moral support that is really close to you, but at the same time you have to care for them as well. So [pause] it’s sort of a trade-off, you get something but you have to give something as well”.

As pointed out by eight participants, love relationships can have an emotional effect on students. This emotional aspect could be both positive as well as negative, depending on the situation. Breakups in romantic relationships is a factor in producing negative emotional consequences, as succinctly suggested by JY, “In the case of a breakup it could lead to depression which could affect your studying”. However, supportiveness or knowing that you can rely on your partner for comfort was highlighted as a positive aspect. In this view, a relationship allows you to have an emotional attachment and affectionate feelings toward a partner who you feel comfortable and intimate with.

one of them is more motivated to study because his girlfriend is there...And the girlfriend is more motivated (Yuyu)

I think is helpful...Doesn’t feel lonely...You need always company, you can talk (Killa)

Friendships. International students in this study also shared their views on the role of friendships throughout their time at university. All of them believed that social interaction is one of those elements in predicting their well-being. According to them, there is a need for having friends whom you can interact with physically or virtually and trust to help each other in a time of need. In addition, there was general agreement that the emotional bond with friends in their home country is stronger than the bond with friends in the host country, yet regardless of their location, all of them are able to provide some kind of support. For example, Yuyu expressed how important relationships are for his mental health. He values

having friends, as they make a difference in his university experience. Interestingly, he mentioned appreciating his friends regardless of where they are, as technology makes it easy to keep in touch with them. Among the things he values most in a friendship is having the possibility of talking to someone. When sharing his experience with friends, Yuyu said:

by calling them, by chatting with them, in a way I take a break from my study...It's not much...but it sort of accumulates over the time. So I would say by talking to them, they're giving me moral support that I need in order to just keep studying...Just indirectly they do that yeah...just talking with them just makes me feel like eased in general...And that really helps me a lot in terms of my study

When participants described their experience with friends in the host country, they mainly referred to students they know to some degree, share relationships with, enjoy being with, both support in different aspects and receive support from, and in some cases they feel comfortable sharing their personal problems with. Nevertheless, it seems like there is not necessarily a strong emotional connection, feelings that come together to create a bond between them. For example, they have friends whom are friends just because they go to the same classes, live in the same flat, or share ideas and random facts with just to fill up a conversation. When it is about friends back home, the situation seems to be slightly different. In almost all the cases, students referred to people they have developed a stronger emotional connection with, the reason why they try to keep contact, no matter the distance.

For about half of the participants, although friends back home are supporters, their presence is not always as important as family support. For example, Killa said: "...my friends, usually don't give me advice...because they don't know about my situation...when they give me advice, advise me, only say 'Study hard, be patient'". These participants argued that it is likely that family members offer unconditional support while friends spend leisure time with you, which is needed sometimes but is a distraction at other times. There are differences in the mode and frequency of communication, which is more frequent with family. Also, some

students mentioned that while there is preference for video/phone calling family, friends are mainly contacted through text messages.

Mainly family members, I don't skype with friends, I just message (Lavinia Moala)

around six friends...from high school this chat also sometimes we make, make, some jokes and talk to each other (Killa)

When talking about friends in the host country, participants mentioned people from different countries, from their same country, and host friends. To an extent, they all described to having a mixture of those three types of networks but there is a tendency to have more interactions with either students from the same culture or other international students. Yuyu signals this in the following excerpt:

I would enjoy more having international friends...there's a strange [mm-hm] strange connection...We know both of us come from different place than New Zealand...because of that strange connection we both are different, we both come from different places, we both try to survive here. We sort of like make quickly friends....it's easy for me

Regarding interactions between international and local students, while only three participants shared merely positive experiences, seven believed that at times they find it difficult to interact with local students. For example, when sharing his experience, Leon said:

I tried to ask and their reply is "Ah, I'm never in Facebook"...implicitly deny your [laughter] your request...Yeah, but, really want to communicate with domestic students. Ah, I, I don't have so many domestic students friends I'm good at like meeting people from other countries...and I find the local students are hard to, to, to, get engage

Paul, as a native English speaker, explained that it is easier to interact with other English speakers as that does not require much effort: "A lot of people could be quite maybe not xenophobic but no so eager to sort of trying to interact with people who do not sort of sound like them much".

It was noteworthy that some of the factors making international students less attractive to engage with is some people's individualism, lack of interest to get emotionally involved, lack of international experience, and lack of openness to diversity. For example, Paul explained:

“I think if you’re just surrounded by people who are like you it’s very easy to become, sort of narrow minded. Like it just reinforces the same ideas in your head, if everyone shares the same thoughts and same opinions it’s like it’s not alright, then you become...insular, whereas, like it’s kinda hard to maintain a set belief in your head when you’re constantly meeting people who have entirely different beliefs”. He also explained that being exposed to the international community “sort of forces you to keep an open mind, stops you falling into traps, of sort of, kinda prejudice I guess? Through ignorance if anything. Um. I think it’s healthy, definitely”.

What some students believed could help many non-native English speaking students to have better chances to engage with people, including domestic and Western students, is being fluent in English, being able to offer academic support, being of the same age, and having school-aged children enrolled at a local school.

Just independent people...just know that person but they are not really your friends...it’s just like [mh-mm] I know that person she’s like studying here and then what her name is, but you don’t have, really have connections as a friend...Emotional connections (Kim)

‘cause I have the feeling that a lot of the new Zealanders tend to, to, stay together not necessarily mixing much with the international students. But maybe that’s because yeah they are kind of, since they haven’t really travelled much (SM)

With regards to making friends in the host country, the data showed that although flatting helps with connecting students, it may promote activities among them that are not suitable for everyone. Living with other people was mentioned as a potential challenging situation as some international students might be put in the uncomfortable position of sharing spaces with people they do not share common interest with. They may find it hard to deal with this situation and thus connect with other students. For instance, as described by Paulo, drinking is one of the defining features of some university students and university culture, a feature which not all international students enjoy. He said:

they have lots, yeah lots of, like drinking events...I don't really like to do these kind of stuffs...like during weekend, like they...are playing music and because they are students, they drink

While contact with friends in the host country includes a wide range of supportive interactions, the most frequent support mentioned was academic, emotional, and social support. For all of the participants, the support that comes from friends in the host country, mutual in many cases, is about helping with social life, interacting when they are not studying in order to enjoy themselves. Reo Roy said, "...yeah my friends are helping but otherwise friends most of the times friends are for socializing". In many cases, the help might include encouragement, motivation or sense of wellness (seven participants). While ten participants emphasized that friends can help with academic tasks, four of them highlighted that friends can provide useful information. According to Leon:

keep studying with my friends, they are also from China...we stay together, and also we encourage each other...I can imagine if I study alone...I may forget some assignments, and...lower my grades...After that, if no lectures and, so I have extra time [mm-hm] I will have, I will try to find friends to have a chat...just to say 'hey, what's going on?' 'So, everything ok?'

Jnr Rose was the only participant who believed friends can provide physical and financial aid. She said: "...to make friends is just because sometimes they can help you. Sometimes when you're in uni they can help you like in your work, like school work, or can be either financially or physically. They can be there for you...they can stand by you, even though you just know them here at uni". Also, two participants mentioned they can receive help with adjustment tips. Regarding that, Paulo commented: "They give me advice on how to like to be flexible with the environment, like how to adapt to it, and like they will give tips on study and they also obtain good results, excellent. So for me they can do well, definitely I can also do as good as they".

For two participants the support obtained has an impact on improving English skills. Killa expressed, "...only go out and then talk to people. I want to improve my English [mm-hm]

specially speaking and listening. So my plan this year I want to go out more often talk to people”. Also, JY emphasized that friends’ influence developing a sense of belonging. He expressed, “In the flat I was before with the guys I lived last year they...support each other...if I can get a flat with less people that I actually I understand it would be way better, bring more sense of belonging than having lots of people in the flat...but if your question is like I feel that sense on campus, not really, cause it feels like people just come here do what they have to do and then go”.

Furthermore, some of the places to meet new people or friends that these international students mentioned were lecture classrooms, club events, church—service and events—accommodation, workplace, neighbourhood, and friend-making apps. Interestingly, Lavinia Moala, a student with school-aged children in New Zealand, acknowledged the school as a place to mingle and connect with people.

University campus environment. This theme exposes salient characteristics of students’ mainstream university experiences that might affect students’ chances to achieve their goals at university. Participants looked at facilities on offer at university aimed at supporting the international student experience. They described their perceptions of staff attitudes towards international students and characteristics of the actual institutional academic and non-academic support based on campus to make the logistics of life as smooth as possible for international students.

University staff members’ attitudes. Nine out of twelve participants shared their views on the university staff attitude, raising a mixture of positive views as well as areas for consideration. According to these students’ interpretations, signs of staff members with a negative attitude towards international students include unfriendliness and racism, rude way of treating students, delay in responses to students’ e-mails as well as lack of clarity and

depth in the information provided. When asked about staff attitudes, Latu said "...they are different when they look at the brown and the white". He also expressed that at times students might feel dissatisfied with interpersonal service encounters, as the given support does not meet their needs. For example, when asked about his experience with the academic skill team, Latu said:

I didn't say it is a racist but myself and one of my friends we went at the same time and just they just proofread, they did different things for me and did different things for him...When I came and asked my friend, 'They just go through writing correcting, we didn't go like together. I just put it in there and came back next time' What about my work? [laughter] it's different thing they tell me to come and sit down and do the work at the same time

In line with Latu's comments, Lavinia Moala expressed: "they've been racist...not the lecturers, but people like working in some areas and you get that from the response...I called and they, and I can just feel 'cause I know I am an international student from my accent and they are not really nice when they answer". She also said: "...how doctors treat me, I don't like. I don't want to be like pushed down by them". When sharing his experience with the health service on campus, Killa described that a feature contributing towards his dissatisfaction with the service is a sense of disempowerment that some international students might experience during consultations with doctors, which creates a climate of distrust. He highlighted the importance of trust, which seems to be used as one of the indicators for how students evaluate the quality of health care. The excerpts below are reflections from Killa on the health support he received:

it was not very useful...three things I remember he said 'just sleep regularly' and [mm-hm] 'remember you pray before going to bed'; and [mm-hm] 'be positive'...there's no specialist

I had a skin problem...the GP gives me first time one cream and then after two weeks I used that cream and didn't work, and then again I visited, he gives another cream and used it two weeks...but again it was even worst...finally doctor...said 'I think you should see the dermatologist', and to see the dermatologist he said it takes two months...I visited the Chinese Centre and then everything was ok

Moreover, it was mentioned that having university staff able to engage in proactive communication is of great importance to students. In Paulos' view, this implies acting based on anticipatory behaviour rather than reacting to situations as well as being intentional in the efforts to engage with students in a spirit of service: "They are quite good. I will say, but could be better like if they do have proper communication. So that our enrolment, we don't have so much enrolment problems". Another quality important to students is cultivating non-judgemental thinking, being unbiased when caring for students and aware of their experiences and needs. Reo Roy expressed his sentiment saying "...doesn't matter how bad my results have been, the staff out here has been absolutely amazing". A few participants highlighted the importance of flexibility, and feeling that university staff works to ensure everything is developed as planned. Some of the students' stories of positive and negative staff attitudes are shared as follows:

if I had another set, set of lecturers I wouldn't have been completing my degree 'cause of having the baby...I was advised to lectures that I feel can help me...and I did like have like names such as for courses to take...at that time when I, you know my situation, I talked to my lecturers at that time and they told me "Oh" and they were really helpful, to "You can choose these teachers and these, they are willing to help" (Lavinia Moala)

I feel respected how badly I've done in my academics most of the stuff more or less have been pretty friendly people (Reo Roy)

the international students office, I, I, thought he was not friendly [laughter]...not friendly to me...he was a bit aggressive (Killa)

the staff works hard enough to figure out that everything should be done (Kim)

The scholarship advantage. Although the host country might be an affordable place to live in comparison to other places, some things can be more expensive than in the home country, and thus receiving a scholarship could help reduce financial hardship. Four participants identified benefits that included, but were not limited to, relieving students from the concerns regarding expenses to attend university. Jnr Rose pointed out: "I have this scholarship allowance that I receive and then I can do anything I want to do, like pay my rent

and all this stuff. And then I can use part of it to buy anything for me”. Since many scholarships are merit-based, another benefit was contributing to students’ academic performance. In line with this view, scholarship providers need to know how eligible students are doing at university. They monitor or guide these students’ progress during the period such students participate in the scholarship, motivating or encouraging them to meet standards for academic progress in order to remain eligible. Paulo expressed this sentiment by saying: “I need to maintain a certain GPA in order to maintain the scholarship”. Furthermore, as captured in Jnr Rose’s interview, having a scholarship can also be beneficial as it gives students the possibility to help provide financial support to people, such as immediate family members that depend on them. Jnr Rose was able to start supporting her family financially once a study scholarship was awarded to her.

Health and wellbeing. The research data has showed that some participants expressed their concern about international students being an at-risk population for different health issues. These issues can have a major influence on the international student experience when they need to be physically and emotionally healthy to be able to get the most out of their time spent as students. Four participants believed that a non-academic support that enhances the student experience is health services provided on campus. Reo Roy felt that a positive experience could be attributed to feeling there is a place to access professional support and get help, as he said: “They are assigning people for psychological counselling, I mean [laughter] I’ve been not at the psychological counselling ever but yes there are certain people who just look after you in case you’re not feeling good”.

In line with Reo Roy’s statements, SM mentioned the benefits of having a medical facility on campus affiliated with health insurance companies. This service seems to facilitate students access to healthcare: “...for the Medical Centre is good that they are, when you’re an international student as part of your visa you have to take a medical insurance and they, they,

together with the Medical Centre, so when you get there you don't have to pay anything so yeah it's good. I mean in terms of health or something like that...you don't have to worry how much it's gonna cost".

Childcare on campus. Studying in an institution that has adopted a childcare programme seems to make a difference for international students with dependent children. This non-academic support is a benefit for student parents and especially for those who have no other family members in the country able to offer them support in taking care of their children. Childcare on campus can help improve their student experience by reducing the need for choosing between attendance at university and family responsibilities, or by keeping them near their children so they can better focus on academic duties while on campus. Lavinia Moala, one of the two participants of this study with a partner and children, mainly held the belief that there is a need for child-care centres on campus. She explained that an affordable cost and on-campus location gives relief to students and enhances their university experience. She said:

last year I didn't I know about...the university's day-care...this year I was told that there was like day-care and it's like cheaper that I can afford so I have a baby like is taken care while I come here which is more like comforting...Last year I had a lot of trouble like taking baby to like the [unintelligible] and I don't drive so I had to ask someone else. And had to do a lot of stuffs too, go and [laughter] get my baby, come back [laughter]...But now I just come here to the campus, leave the baby there and come here

Career support. The topic of available careers, internships and employment support, held with all aspects of career decision making and job searching, was brought up by five participants, with Reo Roy stating: "...career people, I've had one, two, maybe three sessions with them so far...I have to make use of the...career facilities in order to get myself a job". These participants mentioned that in many cases and in their efforts to complete an internship, which is a degree requirement required by some graduate programmes, their only one option is traveling back home as finding an internship in the host country can be a long

and difficult process. However, returning home for a short period can be a stressful situation due to its financial demands and students' financial constraints.

When asked about his plans for finding an internship, which is mandatory for graduation, Paulo said: "...we know like there's a disadvantage for international students because like for those who want to work for internship here like this is very hard to get an internship because the companies will rather hire the local citizens so residents instead of taking the international students".

Furthermore, although participants expect university to assist them with this service, they revealed that misconceptions about international students' needs in terms of internships entrenched in university staff as well as employers are barriers that affect students' perceptions of the efficacy or quality of this service. For example, this concern was exemplified in SM's statement: "They assume that if you're an international student you have the opportunity to go back to your country to do your internship, so they might assume that they don't really need to provide you more service... maybe they think it's can be unfair for locals or something". In this regard, Paulo mentioned: "It feels quite uncomfortable like because I have to pay for air ticket. Yeah if I go back to my home country to work, like the amount, even if they pay me the amount is not enough to cover for the air ticket". SM's and Paulo's statements clearly show the differences in the perceptions of university staff, employers and international students about needs, constraints and demands in terms of career development. In their views, these differences in perceptions are most likely to be obstacles to effective and practical international student support, limiting the access to support services in line with students' real needs.

Diverse user needs in the library. When the international students in this study explained how they use the university library space and services, an aspect that emerged from

the data was that university library use is very diverse. Eight students agreed that the library is an important support to their academic life. Some of them (four participants) mentioned that the access to multiple resources facilitates and encourages their learning. Paulo expressed: “I do borrow a lot of books many times for my study. So I don’t have to buy text books...it saves quite a lot of money for me”. However, the library was not only seen as a place that offers a collection of resources to support students’ academic needs, but as a place to interact, engage and also study (five participants).

the only time I’ll be in the Library in is during the run up to exams...and I’ll study in libraries. Because I can’t, I’m really bad at sitting down...and spending a period of time and just study...in my house (Paul)

for the discussion room...Studying with my, like studying in a group...also studying in a group is better than studying alone (Kim)

The environment design was another aspect to consider. Two participants brought up this aspect, with Paulo mentioning the importance of having a library environment that promotes comfort. In line with the views expressed by Paulo, for Reo Roy the library is a place to unwind and relax. He said: “...because that building somehow gives me a sense of calm, like relaxation...library is amazing you get some amazing views of the Port Hills from the 11 floor...you get to see planes landing”. Yuyu mentioned the importance of an easy and clear process to access resources: “I experienced myself throughout the semester. If you wanna borrow textbooks and stuff, it’s pretty easy...in terms of service it’s clear, it’s nice”. Also, Jnr Rose saw the library as a place to get academic documents ready and as a place to meet up with academic staff, as she said: “Yeah I normally come to the library to do printing and stuff...Scanning, photocopying and meeting my private tutors”.

Negative experiences were attributed to having periods when access to resources is difficult due to the high demand for them, as explained by Yuyu who said: “Lots of the students look at textbooks at the library, like at exam week. So you can imagine if the whole class is trying to get that book, it would be pretty hard”. Another negative experience identified was being

allowed to book study rooms for group work or discussion for only a limited amount of time (one participant). This sentiment was expressed by Kim: “a thing that I don’t really like...two hours is too short...last month I came here to study with my friends and I thought it’s summer and...no one will go to study and need to book a discussion room. So we just booked the room and then at that time no one, we booked two hours, and no one asked us but then actually there was like when we locked, when we closed the window, you know to talk, actually someone had like booked after two hours...So [laughter] we had to leave to another room...So inconvenient”. In these students’ view, having a clear understanding of the library’s capacity limitations and demand patterns would allow the university to design strategies for matching the supply and demand sides of the library service and thus avoid struggling with demands from students.

Academic support. International students face important academic challenges that affect their learning outcomes-performance in class, assignments, and exams-and put them in a disadvantage with other students. The participants in this study looked at the variety of available services and resources provided by university to help international students speed up their learning process and meet learning standards.

Students mainly discussed the role of academic tutors and the academic skills team. Only a small minority of participants mentioned academic advisors. There was agreement among five participants that tutoring is a vital component of the university teaching-learning process, a strategy that provides academic benefits for international learners across the subject areas. Students felt that tutors are people with knowledge and experience in specific content areas who can provide assistance, additional or complementary instruction, helping international students improve their educational performance. This sentiment was expressed by several participants, with Lavinia Moala mentioning that “They help me understand the content

better, yeah...So, I ask questions when I discuss my work with them". Also, while Killa mentioned motivation, SM pointed out availability as tutors' main characteristics.

sometimes he...stimulate me to study hard and then yeah be patience (Killa)
even if like the lecturer might not be the most approachable person there's
always like tutors or people that you can talk to (SM)

Another related aspect that was noted by some students is that investing in tutors is of great relevance. Adopting an institutional approach to ensure all tutors, domestic and international, receive quality training would lead to high quality of tutoring. Leon raised the point of managing the tutor team more effectively and focusing on increasing its levels of productivity.

here's pretty poor...but I have to say that the international tutors quality is
better than the local tutors...I recommend that the university should, should,
you know, training the tutors...how to teach the students rather than just
[laughter] like wasting money giving 26 dollars per hour

One other service that emerged from the interviews was academic skill support. Seven participants shared views on the advisory and resource service offered to raise student achievement through supporting study skills. They mentioned the benefits of this service for international students, with Jnr Rose saying: "I have used it before with my, yeah, how to, how to, manage my time...and also I have used it for my essays, essays writing and my reports". Kim said, "I went to a workshop for like budgeting...and like control your saving...and manage your finances...which is not really for studying". These two participants underlined the importance of the services provided by the academic skill team, which mainly focuses on writing and study strategies but at times, they can also provide some non-academic support. Although most of these seven participants agreed on the importance of this service as support to their studies, for some others the service is not useful for the papers they are currently studying, as they do not require essay-writing skills. Killa said: "because for my major I haven't written my, a lot of writings...only, usually for...short writings...It's not very long, and then my major info, computer things and statistics, don't need to write a lot of

reports”. Although almost all participants had positive views on the study skill service, concerns were voiced about the possible adverse effects of allowing students to only make limited number of appointments to make use of this service during the academic year, with Paulo saying: “But it’s like just limited 10 appointments, so like yeah per year. So, yeah, I have to like think carefully like to the save it for the future time...Increase more frequency, I’d like to go to the skill centre for more times”. Also, there was noted the need for a consistent level of quality in the service, which would lead to the students feeling valuable to the university. Among the alternatives to academic skill support provided by university few participants mentioned relying on peers and searching for a reliable person interested in private proofreading work.

Another aspect related to academic support was the role of academic advisors. At least two participants shared their experience with them and reported a positive perspective on the role they play. These students highlighted academic advisors’ duty of care to students—moral obligation they fulfil to support students. Jnr Rose commented: “I think the first person that I have to contact when I have any academic issues is my yeah advisor”. This view of the important role played by advisors was supported by the perceptions of Latu, who said: “Always checking on myself the first year everyday weekly, just email me ‘How’s study?’ ‘Everything alright?’ sometimes they ring me and say ‘Are you feeling comfortable with your accommodation?’”. Jnr Rose and Latu think it is helpful to make students feel that advisors are there for them, checking in on them, as international students might just need to know that someone cares.

Social scene at university. To some extent, all participants to some extent reflected on the social scene at university, places or events where they can hang out between classes or when they need a study-break. Social activities and events held on campus and university clubs were among the things mentioned by several interviewed students. Eight participants

shared their perceptions of university clubs. Although all of them knew about clubs on campus, not all join them or have a positive view of their experience with them. One of the negative situations identified was the lack of representation of international students in some university clubs that are built around only some countries or mostly led by domestic or Western students. Lack of clubs' own spaces on campus, social activities that do not suit some international students' interest, and not irregular club meetings were also among the things that contribute to see the campus as a daunting or unfamiliar place for international students. In their views, addressing those scenarios would contribute to enhancing student cohesion and providing better support for international students. The quotes below illustrate these points:

I don't really feel part of it 'cause it's just different hobby things...I don't drink and stuffs and most of the activities will, will be. It's just I don't really feel, think I fit in that kind of activities they design and stuff. I feel maybe it's also because I have a family and stuff in my young community (Lavinia Moala)

with the clubs, they really try, but when I see the clubs is just like, is just...It's just dominated by the locals (Lavinia Moala)

I think they don't have a building for the clubs...That's why they don't have like big activities...only, big activities few, I mean few times: orientation stuff and then middle, and then before term break or before exams (Killa)

One other response related to social life on campus was about the different social events organized for students. Three students shared positive views of them and emphasized their impact on making them feel there is an institution that cares and includes students. Yuyu stated that: "I think all of them are good enough...because...for example you see diversity week, Pacifica week...it already show that university does care about the students and provides a lot of services. In line with Yuyu's comment, Kim stated: "UC like is really good at welcoming students...there are many activities and the whole week [laughter]".

Campus infrastructure and location. Students shared their views on the physical state of campus and its geographical location. Almost half of the participants (five) directly

showed their appreciation for studying in a place committed to significant enhancement of its buildings and investing into state of the art infrastructure, highlighting modernity and accessibility as two main characteristics of desirable spaces.

the new engineering building's done and that's an awesome building, like the first time I walked in there I was like "wow"...it's a cool building, I like it...It's quite exciting...Yeah well I mentioned the first time I walked in I like stopped I was like "Wow this is incredible" like...I mean it's weird, I've never been excited about a building before [laughs] (Paul)

What I like the most...they are [pause] renewing the university. They are always building new buildings and, for, especially for engineering students yeah. You have access to very modern buildings (SM)

While four of them had mainly positive attitudes towards studying in a large university campus, two students believed a large size campus can be problematic at times. A large size campus might demand students to spend more time moving from one side to the other.

Lavinia Moala said: "...open just the infrastructure is really for me is very good...has a lot of space...to study, to learn, to hang around". The same participant also felt that: "...sometimes like it's hard for me...when I have courses between in here and...Dovedale. It was really hard. I always was late for one of my courses I think for like two semesters or three semester when I had those courses...like right after the next...I was always late about 20 minutes to next class...So I always missed a lot of, some of, one of those classes I didn't manage like going to those 'cause I was always being late, and I was like I didn't like going late to classes...So better just not go yeah".

The geographical location of university was another factor brought up by participants. Three of them described how satisfied it makes them feel to live in a foreign country or a region whose setting is something they enjoy for its inherent or built beauty that offers leisure and amusement. Affirming this view, Lavinia Moala expressed that: "...what I've found most enjoyable is not any work but I enjoyed the experience of like living in New Zealand...the, the country is such a beautiful place to be. The weather is so nice like is cold but like today is,

is, just, is just a nice place to be...the country is beautiful...what I'll miss most is like just taking walks...in like Hagley Park, in, yeah we have those big areas just to go lay down and read about and just to relax".

Teaching and learning. The majority of interviewed students (eleven out of twelve) shared views on the teaching and learning conditions and on how the lecturers' abilities enable themselves to help international students learn and raised their achievement outcomes. These students focused on best practices as well as concerns about lecturers' performance. From their perspective, lecturers' attitude toward international students makes all the difference, influencing effective teaching and thus student satisfaction. For example, when talking about positive experiences with lecturers at university, Reo Roy expressed that "...teachers kind of never take students for granted...They expect the students to work hard. I'm sure [pause] that [mm-hm] like the teachers are absolutely fine". However, Killa shared a negative experience that clearly showed his dissatisfaction with quality of teaching: "Yeah it's not good...When I want to study, when I am studying my masters I don't want to study here... 'cause some lecturers really was not useful...Just, I just need the credit that's it. I just wasted money. I didn't learn anything". Overall, as shown in Table 8, participants identified positive teaching practices and lecturers' attributes that they viewed as being attributes that enhance the learning potential of international students in their courses.

Table 8. Positive Teaching Practices and Lecturers' Characteristics

Item	Description
Teaching practices	Using practical examples as part of the lectures
	Answering students e-mail communications
	Dedicating some available time to meet students
	Answering questions students ask during or after class
	Providing individualized support
	Interacting with students in class
	Enabling students to learn and study at their own pace
	Providing career advice
	Helping students to think more critically
	Inspiring students to learn new teaching approaches
	Making everyone feel welcome and included in class
	Expecting students to work hard
	Expecting students to be mature
	Providing tutorials and assignments to prepare students for exams
	Making information available in advance
Lecturers' characteristics	Having a kind and friendly attitude towards students
	Enthusiasm
	Passion about the subject
	Being understanding
	Being encouraging
	Dedication and commitment
	Tolerance and patience
	Being strict
	Being fun
	Showing care for the student

Furthermore, Table 9 shows what some students believed does not stimulate them to study and perform at least as expected, and thus contributes to poor teaching.

Table 9. Poor Teaching

Item	Description
Teaching practices	Focusing on reading power point slides in class
	Providing ineffective answers to students questions
	Avoiding to answer students e-mail communications
	Giving insufficient clues or details for the assessment (assignments and tests)
	Reluctance to engage with students
Lecturers' characteristics	Unkindness
	Unfriendliness
	Inflexibility
	Preference for certain students—domestic students
	Coldness

From their perspective, developing positive or negative relationships between lecturers and students depend on lecturers' teaching practices as well as personal and professional characteristics. The nature of lecturers' relationships with their students dictates the impact that they have on students—quality teaching and learning. As suggested by two of them, the limited student-lecturer relationship represented, among other things, by the lecturers' reluctance to reply to students' e-mail communications may be caused by the high-class size that does not let lecturers allocate personalized attention to meet each student's needs, goals, and learning styles.

Class Size and its connections with the student experience were some of the aspects most commented by participants. There were divergent opinions on how the size of the class affects the student experience. Ten students described their experience with the number of students in the lectures; most of them felt that a large size limits effective teaching and learning. A small class size would allow a better student-lecturer relationship as well as peer relationships. It would allow lecturers to know students, and thus better communication with students, individualized support and clarity in the message delivered. In addition, better interactions could encourage students to ask questions, know each other, and more concentration. These views are explained in the following statements:

during my high school my class size was very small I just, just, came here is like few hundreds in one lecture theatre, it was like...adjust to it (Paulo)

currently my class size is quite small. I think this time the lecturers will get to know every student because last year was a group of few hundred students so the lecturers just don't care who you are (Paulo)

I prefer smaller one...I can ask, I can ask questions (Killa)

Smaller class 'cause I feel like the teacher is interacting with me...I can focus more, I can study more...I can hear the voice of the lecturer clearer...for the big class...I feel sleepy cause I feel like I'm just like one drop of water in the whole sea (Kim)

However, such views were not shared by all. Latu felt that small classes are uncomfortable, as you might be on the spotlight: “I feel good like sitting in the class with a lot of students...a small class is...uncomfortable one...if you have a small amount of class, then you have to attend the class [laughter] come early. If you’re late, it’s gonna be very bad... you come and sit down, and then is like questions...and you’re like ‘No. I don’t know anything’ and you feel bad to say you don’t know anything”. Reo Roy believed that class size does not matter at university as lecturers are expected to have the skills to handle either large or small groups. Interestingly, two participants raised the point that given the high demand for higher education this is understandable that large class sizes become a part of a teaching setup at the university. As Kim said: “...there are too many students so we cannot divide it into many groups that would take up the time of the lecturer and the university...’cause there are too many students so it’s reasonable to have that big classes”.

Nine out of twelve participants reflected on the courses required for their majors, topics and subjects covered, and the outcomes students are expected to achieve on completion. Among these students, some raised the point that there are subjects genuinely more difficult than others. They also mentioned that depending on students’ level of English skills, some majors might be easier to handle than others might for some international students.

I see a lot of differences...even in each department I see a lot of differences... In terms of the university giving the student a chance to learn, really depends on the department (Yuyu)

many international students, they don’t study political sciences...they have the language barrier...They can’t read a lots of books, and they can’t write like lots essay like Kiwis...international students, they take the commerce paper or engineering, sciences ‘cause they don’t need to write lots of things...Science, is, doesn’t [pause] [mm-hm] require advance English (Killa)

In line with these views, three students noted the importance of having a variety of courses from where to choose and being offered flexibility in what they study. Kim said: “...there’s a problem...I want to take summer courses, but not many courses here”. Also, two of them

pointed out the importance of structuring courses with a strong focus on both the attainment of knowledge as well as the development of students' practical skills to work in their chosen field. From Yuyu's perspective the need for a more practical teaching and learning was illustrated as follows:

the way they teach is just keep giving you work that needs [mm-hm] team work, whereas in my department...most of the time we do everything individually...I think depends on the department itself...you have to work hard, so why you have to work hard, because in the working environment you still have to do it anyway...you can't expect like 'Ok, do A' and then you do A and you're done. In a working environment usually they just say "Do C", but in order to get C you have to do A and B...In my department most of the time is like that "You do A", "ok just do A"

Additionally, SM argued the significance of fostering a culture of collaboration between university and the professional world.

more willing, I think, to work with the industries...I mean they do have connections but it's mainly big companies...I'm not entirely sure if it's useful for students 'cause, it's, those companies might have needs and might provide sponsorships but, for example my company, where I work is a, is more that a start company...they would benefit from help you grow and then being, being, involved in the community, you know around Canterbury...yeah kind of how in San Francisco, they have the city...with all the universities and the lots of companies, you know, are working together

Lavinia Moala emphasized the importance of encouraging students to think critically and widening horizons in terms of career development.

The classes I take, I really enjoy. They are really eye opening. They made me more open minded...encourage me to think critically...that's really high level of thinking for me...I didn't, like, use to think like that before; I just, whatever I see I accepted without choose sometimes. I dint like, I didn't question and stuff

Another aspect that emerged from the research data was student schedule. As students described, although they usually spare some time to do non-academic things, it appears that most of their time is dedicated to their academic duties. Leon expressed his position in this regard: "...feel satisfied with that...I study almost six hours every day, just go to class and then after class stay in the library, do the recap, do some practice, [mm-hm] maybe squeeze

sometime to go to the gym”. Almost all interviewed students felt they cannot neglect their studies over the breaks or holidays. They still need to dedicate some time to review academic papers or work on assignments, which they viewed as time-consuming and demanding tasks. Further, they referred to be habitually busy but there are periods when they are busier—before exams, and when approaching the end of term as well as assignments submission deadlines. An example of this situation was provided by Paulo: “And yeah holiday I was quite free, so what I did was like went out for holiday, because of short trip yeah like during normal study I couldn’t do that...because lots of work load. And yeah and during holiday we, we literally have not lecture at all. So yeah this period just a bit of revise of [mm-hm] lectures from home”.

Chapter Summary

I provided a synthesis of the different understandings that participants had about the category international and success at university. Those similarities that arose from the research data were clustered and described in the form of five themes, each one with its corresponding sub-themes. When discussing what being an international student meant to them, sense of identity was a major premise which included stereotypes and assumptions held about international students as well as sense of uniqueness and sameness. Regarding success at university, the term can have many different meanings that include, but are not limited to, academic indicators. Further, most participants recognized and linked intrapersonal, interpersonal and institutional dimensions with potential chances of success at university. Some of these aspects flag a misalignment between student’s expectation of what university would be like and how the university arranges its work. The findings from these themes are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: Getting There

Introduction

Two composite narratives were created from thirty-nine interviews with international undergraduate students. I do not discuss one individual, instead I used my judgement to create stories that capture the essence of these students' perspectives (Willis, 2018).

Composite narratives are engaging means of communication (Thompson & Kreuter, 2014) and these two stories aim at helping readers, academic and non-academic, to develop more embodied understandings of these students' experiences. My intention is to give my readers a backstory. This would enable them to form a picture of the students' experiences I explored and intrigue them before I interpret the findings resulting from this study in the discussion chapter that follows this one. Pipher (2007) noted that composites are seen as:

particularly effective in places where logical statements would inspire argument. If a story is well conceived and well told, listeners are likely to experience emotions that soften their positions and enable them to consider the speaker's point of view (p.190)

These stories derived directly from the research data. They represent or are based upon real international students and their descriptions of their real lives. The process of producing these narratives relied on the seven steps I followed for the data analysis described in the methodology chapter. In general terms, the stories are completely based on the students' comments, which were transcribed verbatim. I did not impose any judgement on their experiences, opinions, motivations, or feelings (Willis, 2018). In addition, although these narratives mix interviewees of both genders and, among other things, different ages, I assigned a specific gender, age, and name to each of them in order to tell the story in a more comprehensible way.

In some respects, being an international student myself defined my positionality in this study as an identity that aligns with research participants. Yet as a postgraduate international student, and not an undergraduate, I did not share the same subcultural bonds as them. However, my positioning and conducting the interviews myself helped me with building rapport and gaining a clearer understanding of these students' views of being international individuals experiencing the world of university. And it was these understandings that I used to construct the narratives of Maria and Enrique.

Maria's Story

My parents were born and grew up in poverty and things were rough during those years. They constantly worked hard, sometimes holding down more than one job at a time, to make ends meet and, once they had children, to give us a better life than the life they had. Eventually, they were able to bring us out of poverty into something closely resembling the middle class. My hardworking parents did not complete their education; they left school and worked full time to supplement the family income after they got married. However, as they have high expectations of the power of a degree, both of them always wanted their children to walk through what they call "a safe route", complete their education and attend university. Their advice on which degree to study was based entirely on obtaining a decent job in the future. They discouraged me from pursuing my own interests and studying something I am passionate about, as they believed the prospects were unrealistic and not as beneficial as I thought. My parents see some specific academic degrees as more valuable than others based on what society values more; not wanting me deviating from the norm, as they believe pursuing any of those graduate degrees would give me a more secure future.

Also, it is very common in my country that parents prefer their children to continue their university studies abroad. They choose some of the English speaking countries as the best

destinations to study, expecting their children to have a world-class education that is attractive to employers who prefer to hire graduates with international experience.

After finishing high school, I took the decision to study in an English speaking country and what my parents wanted me to study, not being as happy as they expected me to be.

However, I must confess that the more I read about studying overseas, the more excited I became. I found on the internet plenty of stories of successful students in foreign countries.

These students shared how welcomed they felt, the opportunity they had to make lifelong friends, and, among other things, the opportunity they had to gain a greater knowledge of different cultures. In addition, the information offered by the recruitment agent, approved by my university to assist international students in the application process, told me many good things about studying here and thus encouraged me to travel. Now I know they left out an important part of information, omitting key details such as the challenges international students usually face. Furthermore, knowing that I was always a good student, my grades were always top of the class, as well as obtaining more than the minimum

English language requirement for admission to the programme I needed to enrol in made me feel ready to pursue university studies in this country. The enrolment process was quick and soon I was on the plane convinced I knew what to expect and excited for this new adventure.

During the orientation day, I found a warm and welcoming environment at university and saw hundreds of people from different countries together for the first time. My excitement increased as I thought I was going to meet all my expectations. A few days after, I was attending classes and 'the fairy tale quickly started turning into a nightmare'. I found the lectures incredibly hard to follow, just trying to understand what was being said required a substantial effort, and I found the course materials were challenging in any case. However, I stayed positive as I thought every first weeks are difficult. Time has passed and my struggles continue. I have difficulties with, for example, the speaking speed and accents as well as with

the slang expressions students and some lecturers use in class. I also struggle with academic writing. Now I am sure that scoring well in the English test required to enrol at this university did not mean I was able to communicate effectively. I take notes of everything I hear in class without even understanding completely, although many times what I write does not make any sense to me.

I spend hours trying to Google the lectures (words and concepts), asking some of my peers, and reviewing books and notes from other students; I make more than double effort to deal with my studies. I even study over the term breaks and holidays, reviewing materials, reading, with the hope of staying on top of the next term. I also have problems when it comes to doing group work. Students are assigned to the groups randomly, which according to the lecturers helps vary group composition and increase diversity within groups. Native English speaking students tend to lead the discussions, and my opportunities to speak are very limited as I am unable to express my ideas as fast and accurately as they do; I lack the confidence to speak freely in English. Also, I excel at Maths and numbers, but feel completely lost when it comes to academic writing. When I work in the sections I am assigned of group assignments, other team members usually correct my grammar and re-do most of what I write as it is not well developed or clear. This situation is embarrassing; therefore, instead of enjoying working in groups, I always feel stressed and discouraged. I heard that English native speaking students actually prefer working and interacting with other students equally as fluent as they because that implies making less efforts in trying to understand each other. They believe that other international students very frequently lose track of the conversation.

My social life is good but could be better. I usually hang out with the same group of people, who are generally students from my same country. I know a few Western students, some of them locals, but we do not spend that much time together as we do not bond. I wish I could

have more Western friends but I feel they lack interest in engaging with international students and I even heard some of them saying they avoid talking to you as soon as they notice you have a non-native pronunciation of English. I feel my connection with them is more about the academic support I can sometimes offer than socializing with them. At times I feel discriminated, as no matter how hard I try, they do not show interest in making friends with me. I remember a few times I asked some of them if I could add them on Facebook, but my friend requests were not accepted or they simply say "Sorry. I don't do Facebook". This is frustrating as in most of the cases I know they are very active on Facebook. I do my best to interact and make friends with people, but their lack of interest in interacting with me makes me feel discriminated against.

I feel the need to have friends who I can interact with and trust to help me in a time of need. I come from a collectivistic culture and that makes me always want to walk with people.

However, some students come from individualistic places, so they do not connect emotionally with people and even worse with other international students like me. I think that social life is an important part of your time at university and there are heaps of things happening on university campus, events and student associations that could help international students interact. I have been tempted to join them many times; however, seeing they are packed with home or Western students who are not necessarily keen on interacting with me or doing things I am not interested in stopped me from participating.

The situation is harder outside campus. On more than one occasion, I have been physically and verbally abused by locals. I shared these negative experiences with my parents and some close friends at home seeking their advice, but I did not get the support I needed. They really do not understand the stresses I am facing, and instead just pressure me to do well in university or simply advise me to be strong.

The multiple challenges I am facing and the fear of failure to do well in studies is causing me sleep issues. I am experiencing depression, stress, lower optimism and anxiety. At times, I think that leaving my hometown and coming to this country to pursue studies was not the best decision I have ever taken. My experience is deeply unfair. I am treated as an international student for the purposes of charging fees, being required to pay higher tuition fees than other students. I am contributing to this country's economy, but more needs to be done to make certain students like me are adequately protected and have a rewarding experience in this country.

Many times I thought about quitting university and going back home but I am afraid of being labelled a failure as my parents have always wanted me to go to university. They have high aspirations for my achievement, which has motivated them to invest on my education.

Finally, I decided to not quit and finish with university. I suffered with depression on and off throughout my university years because of the challenges I am exposed to. As the only thing I can almost fully control is my academic results by studying hard, a coping strategy I have developed is dedicating my time and entirely focusing on my studies. I avoid interacting with other Western students or engaging with the local community, as I fear rejection. Actually, I am used to studying hard. In my home country, students learn to work hard at their studies, as they need to compete in a highly competitive environment.

Enrique's Story

I am in my 30's and significantly older than my classmates. My journey as an international student started two years ago. This, as for other many international students, is my first experience studying and living overseas. I think I am different from other students in this country as I come from a country considered unique from the rest of the world because of its cultural background—values, language and customs that have influenced my beliefs and

behaviour. I know that as an international student, I am expected to adjust to the new environment, but adjusting is more difficult than expected.

I grew up in a society deeply rooted in traditional values, where children are brought up knowing that parents and teachers are knowledge transmitters and authorities while younger people and students are mainly knowledge receivers, which then overlays a hierarchical structure on the relationships within people in my community. I have been taught to be respectful and use formal language in communicating to them. However, some of my international friends and local students come from less hierarchical cultures where communication is less formal. Among other things, they address lecturers by their first names, but this would be inappropriate in my country. I am not accustomed to putting my hands up to volunteer questions and answers in class. I seldom express my opinions in class, critiquing or challenging other's ideas, and I have a feeling that this is usually interpreted by lecturers and some students as not having critical thinking skills or motivation to think critically. Interacting in class and seeking academic support when I need it have been a challenge for me. I am used to accepting what teachers say without questioning, having or not fully understood what was taught or said. Although lecturers in this university seem to be friendly and expect their students to contact them any time they need further explanations, I do not feel confident enough to contact them. I do not know how to address my emails to them and ask course related questions, feeling unsure about what is appropriate to do.

Also, some taboo topics, forbidden in my home country based on religious beliefs, have been integrated in this university curriculum, being accessible for the students. Learning about them makes me feel uncomfortable, confuses, and embarrasses me. Some of the essay topics are against my beliefs and morals. I am afraid that I will change my moral positions by being exposed to these topics and any shifts in my positions might cause conflicts within my family and community. For example, bringing up any of these topics to my family, whenever I feel I

need their guidance on how to tackle them, creates irritation and leads to arguments and resentment. However, at the same time, I am excited about learning about new subjects and obtaining new foundations and tools that help reflectively endorse my views and evaluate their consistency.

In general, many things make me different from other students so, for example, what may be okay for Western students may not work with me. Coming from a more traditional society, I sometimes do not enjoy the things many students do for fun. The student culture has a strong tradition of alcohol use, but I grew up in a culture that promotes moderation and in many cases abstinence around alcohol. I do not enjoy drinking, so those activities centred on alcohol exclude me as it also does with other international students. When I am invited to these activities, I usually do not join and stay home studying or working on my assignments instead. Sometimes, I prefer going out and dining with any of the few friends I have, mainly students from my country, doing things by myself like walking on the beach, or talking to my parents and friends over the phone or internet. I can also spend long hours in the main library studying alone or with some friends. The main library has a relaxing environment and offers a great opportunity to socialize.

Among the things that do not make me feel happy is a sort of disconnection with university staff. Sometimes I have not felt included or welcome when trying to access to the services, however I have to admit there are also nice staff who extend their hands and help.

I am many years older than the average undergraduate student. I think that life as a mature university student is not easy, but it has some advantages too. Experience of life is one of the great advantages of being a mature student. I have experience that younger students probably do not have. These experiences have made me more responsible and mature than many of younger students to deal with university things. What are the cons of being a mature student?

Most of the undergraduate students are younger than me, so sometimes I struggle to engage with them inside and outside the classroom. Also, it was some time since I last stepped foot in a university lecture and I have to admit that I have felt overwhelmed many times because I needed to re learn how to study.

I do not come from an English speaking country and everyone can easily tell I am not a Western person. I have dark skin colour, black hair and eyes, and particular traditional customs such as the clothes I wear and food that I eat. Compared to international students from countries culturally similar to this country, I have bigger difficulties and challenges adjusting to life in here. The similarities between their cultural backgrounds gives them a different student experience and perspective. In many cases, although they are considered international for enrolment purposes, they feel more like local people. They seem to not have problems interacting with people inside or outside university campus and easily understand everything taught in class. As it takes them less time to understand concepts and work on assignments, they invest less time in their studies. Hence, they have more chances to engage with community and spare more time in extracurricular activities that help them set other types of goals to achieve at university, which I cannot afford to do.

I feel proud of my differences and it feels good that people think you come from a different place, as you can teach them about new things and open their minds. Nevertheless, this is a double-edged sword because being different also makes you face challenges that negatively affect your experience. I am part of a group called “international students” but that does not imply we are all the same. We are all different and our differences make us special but very vulnerable.

Chapter Summary

The story of Maria and Enrique represent the reality of many international students. Through the lens of their experience, we can develop a sense of what life is really like for students who move overseas, which involves facing new approaches and new ways of doing things. These stories reveal what could be a journey towards succeeding at university, a journey filled with expectations, multiple challenges, depression, racism, needs, responsibilities, and etcetera. While no international student experience is identical, they will go through some common experiences while pursuing studies abroad. These narratives are revisited in chapter seven.

Chapter Six: Discussion

Introduction

In chapter six, I analyze the research findings. This chapter draws together the findings and existing research literature to extend knowledge about success at university from the perspective of international students. The discussion is divided into six sections: being different from and similar to others, multidimensional success, demographic attributes, students' readiness for university, connectedness, and institutional commitment to inclusion.

Being Different from and Similar to Others

The following discussion focuses on international students as they look at themselves and identify ways in which they are similar to other students as well as seeing what is different about them and others. These students explored the qualities that make up their international student identity. The discussion in this section is about how seemingly similar international students can be also different.

The literature shows that a common definition for the concept of international student focuses on students who move overseas for the purpose of study (Education New Zealand, 2018; OECD, 2018; Shapiro, Farrelly, & Tomas, 2014). This view leads us to focus on or believe that the official designation of being an international student is based on the student's visa status, enrolment status and the cost of fees for tuition. However, the definition of international student is not as simple as we might think. In this study, participants had different views about what it means to be an international student.

The findings stress a fascinating characteristic of international students, individuals with a double identity based on an integration of their similarities and differences. Participants were

acutely aware of the things that make them different from other international students and domestic students as well. However, they also believed in a collective identity, a sort of shared sense of belonging to a group that combines different elements. Bista (2016) has previously asserted that among the things that typify or characterize international students is the shared identity they forge. The insights provided by these participants suggested that succumbing to absolutist thoughts—holding a binary outlook—is not convenient as this underestimates the complexity of being an international student. Researchers whose findings highlight that the international experience comprises both a diversity and intersection of different aspects support these views (Bhochhibhoya, Dong, & Branscum, 2017; Heng, 2019).

The findings are against the restrictive notion that international students should merely be identified as a group opposed to domestic students as this view can underrate international students' multiple differences. Participants held their differences as valuable and saw the world connects at the university, a place where diverse students interact. A growing body of literature in the field of international education reports studies that acknowledge the heterogeneity of international students. Scholars such as Lausch et al. (2017) have similarly recognized that international students are unique individuals with complex identities and needs. Moreover, recognizing their individuality rather than oversimplifying and obscuring it would help with addressing their needs more effectively and appropriately. Other researchers also support these statements. For example, in Bilecen's (2014) view, although international students may share some pursuits, students differ from each other in terms of nationality, age, gender, social network composition, etc.

Evidence from this study shows that the international identity is not shaped by an inherited past but by current circumstances. It is determined internally by students themselves as well as externally by other individuals. Although participants recognized identifiable features that

make them different from some within the international group, these differences appear to remain hidden since people seem to give more importance to what these students have in common and match patterns based on small details and not on the presence of differences.

How is such an identity created? What these students perceived characterize them as a single group are aspects such as holding an immigration status and being bound by certain visa conditions. Another aspect that seems to affect this shared identity is being admitted in a country other than their own and thus having a different cultural background to the one of the host country. According to these students' views, your place of origin can be the country where you were born or the place in which you grew up even if you were not born there.

Although international students share some common characteristics that might influence how some people think of them, a homogenous group of students, there are multiple characteristics within the so-called international group too that make it diverse. For example, international students do not all look the same, have the same language, or have the same cultural values. However, being different can also be a source of connection. Some share the feeling of being different with other students who know what it is like to feel different, and although they might not share similar characteristics, their mutual understanding of what it is like to be different can connect them.

In line with the idea that international students represent different cultural groups, my research suggests that those international students who are much more likely to face lesser challenges in the host country come from a similar cultural background to the local culture. These students probably speak the dominant local language, share similar cultural values, and share similar physical features and behavioural patterns with local individuals—specifically Western. They may find it easier to engage inside and outside the classroom, deal with academic tasks, interact at social events, and be accepted, among other things. These students can develop the feeling of a common bond, being part of the local culture, which in turn can

influence how they label and see themselves as individuals in the host country. Due to the great chances these students have to experience the host country as its people do, they may feel like locals. This finding supported previous findings by Chiang (2015) and researchers such as Liu, Volcic, and Gallois (2015) who argue that the similarity between host and home cultures influence the cross-cultural adaptation process and acculturation stress experienced by immigrants.

Then, while some feel comfortable knowing that they come from a different foreign land, others hear judgements and feel the stare of other domestic and international individuals due to their different skin colour, language or values. They are subjected to their fair share of unwanted attention but in a very unfortunate way. These students might only be able to befriend other foreigners or co-nationals who they have more things in common with; they have less opportunities to meet local or Western people who are as curious about their culture as these students are probably about theirs. One of the important issues these other students face is lack of connections or social exclusion in the country they moved to, a strange place where they are on their own facing challenges to build their support network. In this situation, being an international student could have a feeling of being out of place.

Another component acknowledged in relation to the particular characteristics of international students is their priorities for their university life. Although one of the main reasons international students move overseas seems to be pursuing university studies, a key finding was that grades are not necessarily the only thing that matters in their life. Some students also prioritize other things that go beyond their university responsibilities, such as developing social skills, networking, and obtaining international work experience. However, it seems as though the more challenges are faced, the more likely some international students are to focus only on academic matters. This study suggests that the less control international students feel they have due to the multiple challenges they face, the less change and uncertainty they may

feel can handle. This in turn appears to affect which approach they take to their university experience.

In addition, people seemingly use stereotypes about foreign nationals as principles to quickly assess them and define who they are as students. This research suggests that stereotypes surrounding international students are constructed by the way other people see them, as well as by the way these students perceive themselves and their fellow students. Although not all stereotypes these students perceive exist are negative, in many cases these opinions end in biased treatment and discrimination based on students' race, religion, or other characteristics.

This study moves the discussion from the question "how are these stereotypes produced?" towards "how is the resulting discrimination maintained and normalized?" Some international students, who live and study in an environment in which harsh behaviour towards them as well as ineffective support in addressing the problem are constants may adapt as they need to in order to get along. They internalize what is being done to them in the form of self-criticism, accept the circumstances of their experience as common and erroneously might assume that international students everywhere are treated in similar ways. Experiencing discrimination is a traumatic event that in many cases can lead to international students being frightened to interact with Western individuals, including but not limited to locals, worrying about what treatment they will receive from them. The feeling of discrepancy between desired and actual levels of social connection as well as safety can put them under high levels of emotional stress. Also, although participants in this study clearly mentioned direct discrimination outside university campus, it seems that incidents of discrimination also occur on university campus. On-campus discrimination mainly relates to feeling rejection from Western students for choosing not to engage with some international students. International research has pointed out similar situations. For example, Lee and Rice's (2007) study, carried

out in an American university, details discrimination against some students with foreign backgrounds and reports that these events are likely to happen both inside and outside the university. They also argued that the problem seems to be bigger for those students who do not come from Western and English-speaking countries.

In terms of discrimination, this study found that some international students are among the most vulnerable members of society, being at risk of exclusion and violence that represents a breach of rights recognized in international human rights commitments, treaties, and instruments translated into local laws. For example, in New Zealand, the Human Rights Act 1993 aims at protecting people from discrimination and unfair or less favourable treatment. Discrimination is one of the hurdles for international students, hurdles that previous research has also looked at. Literature supports the notion that these students' experiences might lead to an overwhelming life and transition with several difficulties including, but not limited to, language, academic and cultural adjustment, communication with university staff and peers, stress, anxiety, isolation, financial issues, accommodation, etcetera. (Baklashovaa & Kazakovb, 2016; Bista, 2016; Furnham, 2002; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015).

The study raises concerns about the role universities can play in fighting against discrimination. As researchers such as Howarth and Andreouli (2015) have pointed out, problems relating to racism and discrimination have their roots beyond the university campus; they are rooted in the structure of society itself (Salter, Adams, & Perez, 2018). Hegemonic representations racialize difference and help sustain the "us-them" binary, enabling discrimination. Further, each context is different and has specific challenges related to hegemonic representations about difference, hatred for some communities or divisions between them, to tackle. From my understanding, these representations that mediate social interactions can be difficult to combat as they are part of institutionalized daily practices. However, what might help the university with fighting against discrimination is supporting

inclusion, engaging with issues beyond its walls as discrimination occurs on and off-campus, focusing on the promotion of moral development, and implementing activities with high ethical standards. Watson (2007) explains that the university could help promote values such as being fair, which refers to equal opportunity and no discrimination. The university can also promote respect, encouraging students to listen to other perspectives and “seeking always to understand the other point of view and ensuring that rational discourse is not derailed by prejudice, by egotism, or by bullying of any kind.” (p.372).

The benefits of universities could have an impact on various sectors within society, setting the tone of people’s public life. In this sense, education is fundamental in fighting discrimination. Universities provide education and prepare students for their contribution to society, being in the position to help encourage students, regardless if they are domestic or international, to reflect upon how we all should live. The discussion is about the contribution of the university to social change, solving social issues. The responsibility of education is not only benefiting students but also the wider society. This view, which has been gaining popularity, implies notions of social responsibility and social engagement (Bokhari, 2017; Millican, 2018). Watson (2007) explains that universities are expected to be positive actors and have a positive impact on societies, and there is evidence of the civic and social roles they play. However, sometimes their impact is limited as “Universities can too easily become header-tank institutions, doing what is easy rather than what is right.” (p.369). In this regard, maybe another question to address could be if universities are internally well equipped and ready to accomplish this social role (Bokhari, 2017).

Multidimensional Success

The intent of this discussion is to analyze international students’ views of success and illustrate the value of students defining success for themselves. This discussion focuses on

standards, which represent judgments about what the individual or others believe achievements should look like, the achievement that matters the most, or the reference point against which other things are appraised. The discussion shows how the concept of success can reflect the standards students want to live up to or the standards they have been given, which may be narrow to the ones they consider.

This research is made complex by the lack of a shared definition of success among its participants. In fact, the term seems to have diverse meanings as students have set different goals to drive their own success at university. A few believed that their success should mainly be measured by their performance outcomes. Yet others opted for a perspective that focuses on different aspects of development and understands success as being good at several things—one's academic, professional, personal, social, romantic and health life, etcetera. Success relating to academic outcomes is both represented in the findings within this manuscript and the research literature. Extant international research suggests that quantifiable student attainment indicators are commonly used to measure the construct of success (Fraser & Killen, 2003; Kot, 2014; Kuh et al., 2006; Mapuranga et al., 2015; Schreiner, 2013; York et al., 2015). Kuh et al. (2006) noted that this term has been “defined using traditional measures of academic achievement such as scores on standardised college entry exams, college grades, and credit hours earned in consecutive terms, which represent progress towards the degree” (p.5).

With specific reference to the reason behind using academic indicators, this study did not focus on identifying reasons. However, some researchers have found that the main reason is functional and related to a perceived difficulty or complexity in broader measures (Palominos, Palominos, Córdova, & Díaz, 2017; Schreiner, 2013; York et al., 2015). York et al. (2015) mentioned that restraining the application of the term success to academic outcomes represents the university's desire for providing evidence of student learning, as

measuring other more complex or abstract aspects seems to be more challenging. Similarly, in a study aimed at assessing university students' self-esteem and academic performance, Arshad, Zaidi, and Mahmood (2015) suggested that "Because many people with high self-esteem exaggerate their successes and good traits, we emphasize objective measures of outcomes" (p.156).

The understandings of success presented by most participants in this study suggest that success revolves around both academic performance as well as other personal interests, plans, and priorities that can be at work at the same time. The prevailing feeling from these students was that analyzing success in terms of its simple constituents, using a reductionist approach that focuses on single features of success only, is not effective. Instead, they preferred a comprehensive approach that conceptualizes success as complex and multidimensional, made up of several and interrelated components. Getting through university was about finding balance between accomplishing academic and other goals, including a range of skills that can be utilized regardless the area of study. In general, students expressed the desire to possess a variety of skills, such as time management, critical thinking, ability to communicate effectively in English both in writing and verbally, social skills and academic skills. For these students to truly succeed and leave university with applicable skills regardless of their career path, it is important to know there is more to their education than coursework, and thus it would be critical that they are given chances to hone their desired skills as they study. Students did not explicitly mention it, but this study also suggests, as emphasized in previous research, that students' plans, priorities, expectations, and understandings might not correspond with institutional priorities or university staff's expectations (Fraser & Killen, 2003; Hearn, 2006; Higher Learning Commission, 2018; Olatunji et al., 2016).

The findings have shown that attaining a sense of belonging to the host country can influence international student understanding of success. Feeling like a local rather than a foreigner can

enable some international students to have a less challenging experience, which in turn influences their goals. While some feel their plans can go beyond university and prioritize things related, but not only limited, to their academic responsibilities, others can only manage their studies. Previous studies also emphasize the significance of developing a sense of belonging among students (Rivas, Hale, & Burke, 2019; Slaten, Elison, Lee, Yough, & Scalise, 2016). Yao (2015) mentioned the idea that achieving a sense of belonging influences well-being and success in college; Strayhorn (2012) supports this idea.

Sense of belonging is important and it takes on heightened importance where individuals are inclined to feel isolated, alienated, lonely, and invisible. Early research on belonging suggested its importance as a basic human need and motivation for behaviour. (p.10)

While students in this research conceived success differently, the findings also suggest that a principle that makes up their picture of success appeared to be the same for all. The concept of success relates to a sense of fulfilment or accomplishment from the attainment of conceived and planned goals, based on personal priorities and needs. Some researchers have previously looked at the restrictive approach to view success as only academic related and highlighted the importance of using alternative frameworks, being geared towards developing a more comprehensive understanding of success. They have raised concerns about increasing the risk of adopting a narrow view of the international higher education experience if success is only measured by achieving specific academic results (Cuseo et al., 2007; Hearn, 2006; Mayhew et al., 2016; van der Zanden et al., 2019). For example, in Schreiner's (2013) understanding, a narrow view does not allow to know "whether students are vitally engaged in learning and making the most of their college education" (p.41). The author proposes a holistic approach of success embodied in the concept of "thriving in college", which implies being intellectually, socially, and emotionally engaged. Literature also points out that there is an increasing demand for focusing on quality education and inclusive excellence, improving different aspects of the students' background (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017), and

capitalizing on the distinctive realities that ethnically diverse students face (Bensimon et al., 2016; Ewell & Wellman, 2007; Fraser & Killen, 2003; Higher Learning Commission, 2018; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017; Museus, 2014; Perna & Thomas, 2006; Williams et al., 2005; Wolff-Eisenberg & Braddlee, 2018). Additionally, being more inclusive of the diverse student populations and giving a better attention to diversity have been helping reveal differences within groups (Kuh et al., 2006),

As a final point, the findings support the view that the need for a broader approach to success is in line with the idea that international students do not form a homogeneous group. Among other things, their experience is culturally specific, an aspect that influences the way they define their own success. As explained by Sandhu (1994), some international students have much in common in their cultural backgrounds than others, and the differences in their cultural experiences generate new challenges for them and specific needs.

Demographic Attributes

Different features compose and stimulate each student's life. Some personal characteristics predispose behaviour causing international students to react to situations in their own particular way. This section discusses international students' views of their various demographic characteristics and focuses on interpreting how these characteristics contribute to their university experience. The participants in this study focused the analysis on age, gender, and marital status.

There is ambiguous evidence in the research literature concerning the relationship between age and student outcomes. For instance, according to Ganz and Ganz (1988), age impacts the academic performance of international students. So the older the students, the better the grades they will obtain. However, researchers such as Pellizzari and Billari (2012) found that younger international students have a better performance than their older fellow students,

while McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) noted that age does not affect academic success.

Whereas literature shows conflicting evidence for the impact of age on the university experience, this research offers important insights from some international students.

This research suggests that age has an effect on the international student experience.

University was described as a place where you can encounter students of all ages. Although literature offers different ways to conceptualize and operationalize age, such as

chronological, physiological, social, life-span and organizational age (Avanzi, Cortini, & Crocetti, 2012), the participants mainly referred to being “younger” or “older”. According to their views, each of these two groups of students faces unique challenges but also possesses different strengths. For example, older students might struggle more than younger ones to balance personal commitments while completing their study, develop a social life at university, and cope with the different responsibilities and reciprocities of academic life.

Younger students might have less knowledge and foundations due to their lesser life experience. What was apparent was a belief that regardless of their age differences, engaging in a mutualistic cooperation may allow them to benefit from each other, potentially resulting in the development of stronger and more positive student relationships.

The findings have also shown that gender does not strictly relate to whether students have special or innate capabilities that make them perform better than others at university in a foreign university. Students consistently believed that male and female individuals are on average much more similar than different across a range of skills. However, some differences in terms of preferences and gender stereotypes reinforce the idea of the existence of feminine and masculine subjects. These stereotypes could explain the differences in the rate of both female and male students between subjects.

Literature emphasizes different and conflicting views concerning the relationship between gender and students outcomes (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012). For example, in Lee, Park, and Kim's (2009) work, international female students showed a higher level of adjustment than male students. Surprisingly they also pointed out that previous research found that international male students face less adjustment challenges than female students. Similarly, in terms of academic success, Ren and Hagedorn (2012) found literature reporting conflicting findings that they described as female international students' GPA being higher than male students; female students facing more issues or academic difficulties than male students; and no significant difference between female and male students' academic outcomes.

One of the findings was students' views of parenting while in university. Single participants focused on the benefits of being single as would mean less pressure and greater autonomy that translate into having more time to focus on their university experience. From the student parents' perspective, parenting has a bearing on students' university life, as these students' main concern is taking care of their family. However, it seems apparent that being a student parent with a partner and children living together in the host country does not necessarily make you unable to accomplish goals at university. In accordance to the results of this study, there are advantages and disadvantages to combining studies with raising children. Having a partner and children can bring joy into the student's life. It can also reduce the amount of time they are available, a reason for experiencing a feeling of missing out on maybe known but unattended experiences. Student parents might struggle to achieve study-life balance at university; time management is probably one of those crucial factors when it comes to maintaining a good balance (Lovell, 2014; White, 2008). There is much evidence in the literature concerning barriers that students who are parents usually need to overcome to successfully pursue and accomplish their goals, with many challenges that influence how these students meet classroom and other expectations. Focusing on barriers has led some to

believe that having children could devastate the academic life of female students (Brooks, 2012; Kantanis, 2002; Long, 2017; Medved & Heisler, 2002; Moreau, 2016). However, this study suggests that planning time effectively might be hard but not impossible to achieve. This finding shows some consistency with previous studies that emphasize that although being a student parent is a challenging situation, it is manageable to negotiate time and space to pursue studies (Behboodi, Ordibeheshti, Esmaeili, & Salsali, 2017; Brooks, 2012).

Through student parent's accounts, this research suggests that students who are parenting draw on various childcare tactics as part of their balancing acts, relying on informal and formal arrangements. For example, family members who offer help in taking care of dependent children are a relief that allows time to dedicate to studying, while a more formal arrangement could be childcare facilities on campus. This finding does not support research that documents discriminatory practices against mothers in academia (Moreau, 2016), research that suggests student parents' home environment does not necessarily support their academic goals, or research that identifies resistance from family members who perceive studying as a parent to be an act of parental irresponsibility (Brooks, 2012).

Students' Readiness for University

This theme reveals international students' perceptions of their readiness for the demands of pursuing university studies in a foreign country. Readiness characteristics link to likelihood of success, determining it before students' enter to university. From these students' perspectives, readiness implies having knowledge as well as a set of skills clustered as cognitive and non-cognitive. They mentioned different components of university readiness that include knowing what to expect of university, emotional preparedness, awareness of English limitations, intelligence level, and academic drive. This study found similarities as well as differences in the participants' perceptions of self-readiness for university. The lack

of awareness or preparation for the demands of living and studying overseas, maybe expecting to do as well if not better at university than they did in school or in their home countries, could enable students to work on an adjustment plan to help a smooth transition.

Although some international students might face serious difficulties once in the host country (Furnham, 2002; Higher Learning Commission, 2018; Museus, 2014; Othman et al., 2013; Wolff-Eisenberg & Braddlee, 2018), this not necessarily would happen because they start their university journey with no prior acquired competences, subject-related competences, or life skills. The findings suggest students believe that the competencies that help them prepare for university can develop through previous educational and non-educational experiences as they progress through life, a point also mentioned by Conley (2008). Participants in this study developed a repertoire of valuable competencies through the course of their lives that are substantially beneficial in helping them cope with some of the challenges they face as international students, different expectations and demands to be encountered in a foreign university and country. Their competences were built in different settings, and they talked about how they came to value their school years, post-secondary education, work experience, and living overseas. Their views broadly endorse and substantiate earlier work in the field. For example, Velez and Roa (2005) noted that current poor academic performance relate to the lack of history of good performance in related studies. Takeuchi and Chen (2013) underlined the positive impact of pre departure experience on expectations, adjustment skills, self-efficacy as well as on perceptions, attitudes and motivation.

the relocation skills developed in previous relocation experiences may help expatriates adapt to the new environment more effectively by ignoring what had not worked for them in the past and concentrating on what had worked well (p.277)

The findings of this study support research that highlights strength-based thinking and challenges deficit arguments (Dresen, Wilmes, Sullivan, & Waterbury, 2019; He & Hutson,

2018). An asset model of education focuses on unique strengths, competences, and capabilities that students may have (Lopez & Louis, 2009). Deficit thinking implies believing that there is something wrong with some students who are perceived to lack resources considered essential to succeed. It ignores students' existing capacities, looks to remediate problems rather than valuing or appreciating strengths, and assumes that there are students more prone to success than others (Valencia, 2012). This way of thinking, whether is promoted by students themselves or other stakeholders, can negatively impact people's expectations for international students, attitudes towards them and services they receive. A deficit-thinking model contributes to the persistence of certain stereotypes and exclusion (Smit, 2012).

Regarding the components of university readiness, this study highlights the importance of being aware of what to expect of university and, implicitly, what is expected of international students. There was general agreement that life at university is full of challenges and international students have unique perspectives that other students, domestic or international, probably do not have. However, knowing what lies ahead, being aware of what an international student should expect of university before commencing university, is an advantage that makes a difference to making the most of the existing opportunities and settling down to a fruitful university life. Accessing sufficient and thorough information before pursuing studies at university could help students make appropriate decisions regarding their academic aspirations. Not all international students have equal access to useful information that could help in guiding their decisions to apply to university, and as Valadez (1998) stated, "Having aspirations to college is simply not enough" (p.19). Accepting an offer and proceeding with the enrolment are only few of the steps to be taken in being ready for university. The findings presented are consistent with earlier studies that reported the students' needs of being informed about not only course dispositions but the

different aspects of the university life in the destination country (Conley, 2008; Valadez, 1998). Furthermore, in the process of choosing a foreign university, using resources of information that are not from the place where they will study, might help prospective international students obtain guidance on what to expect at university, although it could also contribute to the risk of inaccurate information. Inaccuracies in information risk international students not obtaining the information they need: relevant, unbiased, updated, accurate, etcetera.

Another consideration around international students' readiness for university is students' awareness of potential problems due to language difficulties. There was a general agreement by the students in this study that English language proficiency affects the international student experience and although English language is central to the student success at English-speaking universities, proficiency in this language is one of the major tensions for many international students. In this study, not all students believed their English was at a level that would enable them to succeed at university. The language-related problems of international students affect their social and academic life, creating stress and requiring students to redouble their efforts while affecting confidence in their ability to succeed in those activities. Universities require English language proficiency measured through standardized tests from international students in order to ensure they meet academic standards and expectations. However, meeting the English language requirements does not necessarily guarantee that the students have enough language skills to cope with the multiple demands of being a tertiary student in a foreign English speaking country. Standardized tests do not really measure whether students will be able to communicate effectively and smoothly in English. Although students probably consider their overall English knowledge to be very good, they may still struggle to understand others and express themselves.

The understandings presented by participants in this research show that the university is a place where the world connects because of students from different cultural backgrounds and different types of English interacting in the same place. While many are native English speaking students, others are capable of obtaining good scores in English tests, good enough to get a university offer. However, the challenge is to ace daily interactions when many of them find themselves fumbling between words. The problem seems to be linked to “World Englishes”, the different varieties of the English language. Despite their struggles with the English language, some students were confident in believing that their ability to communicate with English speaking people will develop through exposure to an authentic English speaking environment or having chances to interact using English (Andrade, 2009). Participants’ views about English language proficiency tests as an assessment tool and their perceived effectiveness were not only consistent with but also substantiated previous work in the field (Andrade, 2009; Puspawati, 2014; Tsai and Tsou, 2009).

This study also suggests the need to foster emotional preparedness. Students might get through school years in their home countries, but going off to university in a foreign country can be a different story for many of them, a life changing experience they may find stressful. The different challenges they face during their university years may overwhelm them. International students face different and unique mental health stressors, such as being a university student for the first time, being far from home, and living independently for the first time. Furthermore, being away from home, they might lack the support network they were used to. Some students find themselves in a country and environment where it is difficult to get to know and emotionally connect with their fellow students as well as finding their social niche.

Interviewed students talked about a wave of different emotions. They experience positive but also negative emotions such as fear, depression, anger, anxiety, and stress. Struggling in

dealing with these negative emotions effectively affects different areas of their lives: quality of life, health, academic achievement, and social life. The findings emphasize the importance of understanding what skills could help international students regulate their mood as well as difficult feelings and behaviours associated with mental health problems. Students' capacity to control emotions would help them thrive in adversity; being emotionally prepared would contribute to students feeling less stressed, anxious, and more in control of handling the challenges of day-to-day university life. They need life skills for adaptive and positive behaviour, such as stress management, managing sleep, nutrition, finances, time and relationships, living with different groups or outside your comfort zone. These statements are supported by research literature in which there is a consensus that international students are highly prone to problems with stress and depression, being necessary to promote conditions that help fulfil basic psychological needs as this in turn would influence students' emotional well-being and improve their outcomes (Hagenauer, Gläser-Zikuda, & Moschner, 2018; Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2008).

In terms of other personal characteristics, the findings suggest that students' perceived intelligence is an advantage that can determine how successful students could be at university. However, the term "intelligence" has different meanings to different students. Intelligence is one of the most studied variables within personal determinants in the literature and there is empirical evidence suggesting that cognitive ability is a good predictor of academic outcomes (Lipi, 2014; Naderi, Abdullah, Aizan, & Sharir, 2010; Rinaldi & Karmiloff-Smith, 2017; Vargas, 2007). This study supports the argument that there are different types of intelligence and it seems students understood that this individual quality could be nurtured. One might argue that this mind-set or view highlights more the importance of investing time in developing intelligence rather than assuming it is composed of simply fixed traits and it alone creates success. This understanding seems to be consistent with

research that associates the effect of intelligence with the influence received from external aspects (Naderi et al., 2010; Vargas, 2007). Researchers have used different theories and indicators to measure intelligence (Lipi, 2014), and against the belief that it should only be measured by a single score, there is evidence suggesting intelligence is modifiable, as it can be taught and learned.

In these terms, intelligence can be conceived as the phenotypic outcome arising from a fluctuating interaction between the developing system itself and the environment in which it progresses (Rinaldi & Karmiloff-Smith, 2017, p.18)

There was a general feeling among these twelve students that their effort has an effect on their success. In their views, being ready and committed to put in extra time, dedication, and hard work could lead to better outcomes and great accomplishment. Being academically driven emerged in the data as a characteristic that helps students get and stay ahead, demanding to set goals and work towards them to ensure you accomplish them. This study suggests that what could make a greater difference between students is the extent they set themselves up for having a firmness of purpose, a fixed intention to act in a certain way. Students discussed the importance of having the resolve to accomplish goals, carry out tasks with determined results, and respond positively to failure and adversity. This requires developing a system that works for the individual international student, allowing the student to handle responsibility, and a set of positive learning strategies that influence on minimizing chances of unsuccessful study (Abdulghani et al., 2014; Deane & Murphy, 2013; Denovan & Macaskill, 2013; Fraser & Killen, 2003; Li et al., 2010; Vargas, 2007). This study found that among the qualities of academically driven students are hard work, being communicative, being resourceful, investing in developing academic skills, laying good foundations or basic facts, organization or time management, balancing expectations, motivation as well as enjoying what you do, and attending class regularly. Regarding attending class, the statements of some of the interviewed students revealed that attending class is more

associated with students' perceived need to increase their chances to get as much as possible information that could help them do well during assignments and assessments than with aspects such as the teaching quality (Deane & Murphy, 2013; Vargas, 2007).

The findings relating to readiness led to examinations of how important is students' sense of responsibility for their own success. From the interviews, I am likely to believe that research participants in this study perceived the relevance of students recognizing they are accountable for making choices that could lead them towards their different goals. The study demonstrates that students taking a leading role in their own university journey is of importance for ensuring positive outcomes. However, this does not mean that all the responsibility for learning or coping with university life should be shifted onto students; they need to be given opportunities and support to acquire skills and deal with university life. This supports research that has documented how a shared responsibility is essential, as student success depends on external factors, reasons external to the person, but also internal factors that refer to the individual's needs and drive. Tran and Vu (2016) support this finding, declaring that:

it is important to place emphasis on not only nurturing international students' sense of responsibility but also providing them with the condition to enact their responsibility through specific goal-oriented tasks in the classroom as well as in the broader institutional community (p.4)

Connectedness

All participants, who recurrently mentioned that an international experience brings challenges in terms of social life, expressed the need for being part of a community of people who care for each other as well as value and think well of each other. The discussion deals with students' interaction patterns, experiences of their relationship with other people. It examines how students perceived the value of social interaction on their university experience and points out the role played by different social actors in supporting their experience. They spoke about parents, friends, local communities, romantic partners, and university staff.

International students, unlike many of their local counterparts, find themselves in the middle of an unfamiliar environment, and many of them live far away from family and friends. The need of forming bonds with different people was perceived by students in this research as an important component of their university experience. They highlighted the need for feeling others care about their university journey as well as about them as individuals. Myers (1999) referred to what Aristotle denominated as “the social animal” to explain that people “have a need to belong, to feel connected with others in enduring, close relationships” (P.376). In this study, connections imply face-to-face exchanges but also interactions in the context of the digital 21st century when people gain a sense of connection in virtual ways. It is important to mention that technology enables students maintain relationships that would otherwise be impossible (Russo, Fallon, Zhang, & Acevedo, 2014).

The participants raised the topic of sense of bonding or attachment, feeling connected to people inside and outside university, which seems to add value to their university experience. It can bring positive effects on psychological health, well-being, academic life, and social life. This finding is supported by research that emphasises the value of social support in coping with cross-cultural challenges (Yan & Berliner, 2011). This finding contributes to the growing knowledge base about the human necessity to both affiliate and feel accepted by others and the influence of relationships on many different aspects of the student life. My findings suggest that international students are likely to thrive better when they feel they can intimately connect with others (McFaul, 2016; Pietromonaco & Collins, 2017). This sense of connectedness seems to be particularly vital for those students who think are “different” from the norm. As previously discussed, they consider themselves as having markedly different characteristics from what they perceive are common domestic features, principally alluding to Western people’s cultural background. This study suggests there is considerable consistency concerning the important effect that friendships can have on the international student

experience. However, the findings also offer further insights into these students' perceptions of their abilities and possibilities to build and maintain friendships. Students in this research expressed being able to have a mixture of friendship networks that McFaul (2016) identified as multinational, co-national and, host-national.

co-national networks is adopted to explain contacts with other students originating from the same national background. Multi-national networks means connections with other international students, not from the student's own country or nationality. Host-country national network is used when referencing contact with students from host country or "domestic" students (p.3)

Despite students' openness to interact with different type of students, these participants expressed that sometimes it is easier for them to interact with people from their same home community or other international students. This supports studies documenting that there is a tendency for international students to have limited connections with host national students (McFaul, 2016). International students spend many years of their lives at university and interact with different people throughout their university years, but being in the flesh with some of them does not necessarily make for a meaningful relationship. When these students thought of their social connections at home, they had thoughts filled with contentment. They showed how special and strong their connection to friends at home could be, which in many times is stronger than connections to friends in the host country. However, they perceived being able to receive academic, emotional and social support from friends regardless the distance. Bhochhibhoya et al's. (2017) shared similar thoughts and highlighted how greatly international students depend on friends who live in the home country.

International students' tendency to build friendships with people from their own home community is not necessarily related to personal preferences but also to circumstances. It can be challenging for international students to befriend locals or have satisfying bonds and friendships with them (Deloitte, 2008; Ho, Li, Cooper, & Holmes, 2007; Newsome &

Cooper, 2016; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008; Wang, Ahn, Kim, & Lin-Siegler, 2017). This study suggests that although international students may try to fully embrace all the host country has to offer, including its people, sometimes local people as well as some other international students, mainly from Western background, do not share the same enthusiasm for making new friends. Each country has its own nuances, but apparently at a broader level when it is hard to make friends is due to cultural and personality differences. Additionally, students' lack of international exposure could lead to a lack of openness to diversity or cultural awareness, not being able to show an understanding of other people's cultural values that might differ from theirs. Sawir et al. (2008) found that in order to have a more effective bonding between local and international students, local students should be open and curious about international students' lives and values as well as willing to learn more about collectivist relationships.

Loneliness and social exclusion, conceived by students as a sense of empty disconnection in terms of physical and emotional distance from friends, seems to be a common issue that some international students need to cope with (Sawir et al., 2008). Being physically surrounded by people, some international students still feel disconnected or neglected due to a lack of intimate connections, which may emerge as one of the biggest threats to their mental health. There is evidence supporting the notion that having a strong support or relationship quality influences students' well-being, as it helps validate self-identity, self-esteem, and self-concept (Bhochhibhoya et al., 2017), as well as enhancing happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect (Kansky, 2018).

The insights provided by interviewed participants also suggested that community engagement has a beneficial effect on some international student outcomes. My study highlights the importance of involvement with local religious groups. It is not necessarily about being religious, holding specific religious beliefs, or coinciding with the dominant religious and

spiritual beliefs of the host country. Engaging with local religious communities helps boost connections that influence international students' academic life, social life, and mental health, all of which makes important contributions to the international student experience and success. Some of the stated benefits provided for students by religion are consistent with those of previous research in the field of international education (Chai, Krägeloh, Shepherd, & Billington, 2012; Hsien-Chuan Hsu, Krägeloh, Shepherd, & Billington's, 2009). Students mentioned seeking a sense of security, and engagement with local community groups and religious connections seem to help develop confidence as well as provide encouragement and empowerment. These findings support literature that has documented that local communities, including religious communities, positively impact the adjustment process of international students (Kant & McGrath, 2012; Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

Further, students spoke about romantic relationships gaining in importance for the student's life during university and as a result of a desire to belong with others, giving and receiving love. This emotional need to engage and connect with others encompasses more than merely being acquainted with other people but gaining as well as providing attention and support (Ullah, Ahmad, Khan, & Alam, 2016). The students felt that being in a romantic relationship whilst at university entails benefits and costs, positive and negative emotions. What some students also highlighted was that in every loving relationship there is an exchange where you give up one thing in order to get something else that you also desire—trading time for support. The time spent with a romantic partner can distract one from university work, compromise time management, and be the cause of financial problems. Furthermore, a case in point is breakups, which can take a serious toll on students' wellbeing. Believing that this type of relationship can negatively affect different aspects of the students' life has been referred to in previous research (Field, Diego, Pelaez, Deeds, & Delgado, 2009; Schmidt & Lockwood, 2017). However, the statements of some of the interviewed students also revealed that being

in a relationship has proven certain benefits. Supportiveness and feeling that there is someone to rely on for comfort, developing emotional attachment and affectionate feelings, are among the positive aspects of love relationships. This finding supports research that has documented the effects of dating or having a romantic relationship while studying (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010; Popadiuk, 2008).

Additionally, the students in this research recognized that student–faculty interactions are central to the international student experience. University staff attitudes toward international students can aid or hurt student wellbeing. Some attitudes can leave an enduring feeling of negativity with the students and thus feel disenfranchised and belittled. Negative attitudes might include unfriendliness translated into non-proactive communication, reacting to situations rather than acting based on anticipatory behaviour, or not being intentional in the efforts to engage with students in a spirit of service. Other examples are cultivating a judgemental thinking, being biased when caring for students and unaware of their experiences and needs, rudeness, delayed responses as well as providing unclear information. Staff's negative attitudes are source of student dissatisfaction that disempowers them as it creates a climate of distrust.

What contributes to build positive relationships with students? In this study, participants highlighted the presence or absence of staff motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. For example, personal characteristics of university lecturers that influence their positive attitudes towards students could be tolerance, patience, enthusiasm, flexibility and friendliness. However, external circumstances like high-class size might not allow lecturers to allocate personalized attention to meet each individual needs, learning styles, and goals. Hagenauer and Volet's (2014) study has shown that although research on the teacher-student relationship in higher education is not dominant in the international literature, it is an important aspect to consider.

The teacher-student relationship influence students' academic outcomes or progress, represented by course satisfaction, retention, learning approaches as well as achievement.

Among the different aspects that influence the students' university experience, this study emphasizes the parent-student relationship. Looking for parental support through insecurities and guidance to appropriate resources in difficult moments can influence students' ability to adapt and make decisions. Students, regardless their age, gender, whether they have their own family, and busyness, stressed that they value being able to communicate with their parents. Parents could have a large influence over students' university experience, while other family members seem less important; international literature supports this finding (DeFauw, Levering, Msipa, & Abraham, 2018; National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 2007). These students' accounts also suggest that they do not only appreciate the financial support received from parents to further educational studies, but they also turn to their parents for emotional support. These students also uncovered the importance of family involvement in decisions about studying overseas. Further, it might sound like an oversimplification but students' academic achievement seems to be what family care about the most.

Based on these students' perceptions, technologically-mediated communication seems to help students and parents in their transnational interactions. Technology has become integrated into students' daily routines, being an important tool for maintaining parent-student relationship and, for many students, the only means to interact with their parents during their university years. There seems to be more preference for contacting family members, mainly parents, rather than friends. In addition, some participants pointed out the need for a predetermine schedule when communicating across time zones, while others seemed to be more flexible in that sense. Students use diverse technologies. While some of them are more conventional and rely on international phone calls, others referred to social media and a preference for chat messages and video chat. In terms of the frequency, there seem not to be

any particular rules about it. That parent-student communication and continuous interaction is negotiated based on technology is well supported in the literature (Bacigalupe & Bräuninger, 2017; Gentzler, Oberhauser, Westerman, & Nadorff, 2011; Golonka, 2013). This study suggests that irrespective of the distance, parents can still stay involved in the student's experience from abroad, making the student feel they are part of the action.

The support parents can offer seems to be essential for helping students have a successful university journey. However, this research suggests that parental support is a double-edged sword. There are some negative effects on a student's emotional state associated to parent-student relationship. Parental expectations can be crushing burdens that hamper students' growth and affect their emotional state. Parents may have expectations over which students may not have control even if they perform to the best of their ability. High parental expectations might play a part in students' mental well-being causing academic stress or distress with regard to a sort of anticipated frustration related to failure or awareness of their likelihood of such failure. Furthermore, for a few students, parental pressure played a role in career choice. In the international literature, it has been argued that the influence of parents are among the main determinants of the career choice of international students (Fatoki, 2014; Singaravelu, White, & Bringaze, 2005). Choosing a major and career can be complicated and stressful, but with the added stress of pressure from family this choice can become burdensome. Some parents apply pressure for students to strive for specific high-profile careers, perhaps thinking that by doing this they encourage them to reach high career goals. Parental pressure could push students into taking a career path they do not want to pursue or feel ready for, which could negatively influence their performance.

The student-parent relationship seems to be determined by the parenting styles practiced by parents, some more authoritarian than others. Despite the physical distance, some parents are strict, enforce obedience, and refuse to allow freedom. Other parents are more tolerant, not

hovering over students' every move, being lax and not making significant attempts to control them but setting limits. Regardless the different types of parenting, and how best intentions can harm students, participants indirectly expressed parents act in their best interest. The relationship between parenting styles and students' outcomes has been examined in the literature. Love and Thomas (2014) spoke of authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative parenting styles:

Authoritarian parents tend to value high levels of discipline and restriction, and to withhold positive affection from their child. Conversely, permissive parents make few demands on, seldom establish rules for, minimize discipline of, and show high positive affection and nurturance towards their child. Authoritative parents are in the middle of the authoritarian–permissive continuum, providing high levels of positive affection and nurturance, while disciplining their children with established rules, providing structure, maintaining expectations, and encouraging autonomy (p.140)

Love and Thomas' (2004) research suggested a link between parenting styles and college students' adjustment outcomes. Their research revealed that permissive parenting associates with low levels of self-esteem as well as emotional well-being. Authoritarian parenting anticipates low levels of emotional well-being, indicating great amounts of emotional distress. Authoritative parenting style associates with high levels of self-esteem. In addition, there are some cultural differences in behaviour. This study highlights that values, which vary across societies, play an important role in parenting since they may influence students' attitudes and behaviours—value system. Researchers such as Xiao (1999) and Bodovski (2019), who explore similarities and differences between countries in the valuation of independence and obedience, explain this. For some international students it is a cultural factor that a person at university will obey, regardless of it being impossible for the parents to know what is going on. However, while some obey, others say they obey, but do what they really prefer to do. What they could miss from the promise of an international experience if they do obey is the chance to engage in extracurricular events or socialize, things that probably parents do not view as important due to the different expectations they have.

Overall, this study suggests that quality interactions instil a sense of worth and belonging. They have a positive influence on the international students' university experience as they enhance students' abilities to cope better with the different stressors of living and studying in a foreign country. It is evident from the interviews that apart from external factors discussed in this section, international students' desire and effort to engage and interact positively with one another seems to be equally important in terms of establishing an environment that supports meaningful interactions. Once again, the importance of students being eager to play an active role in their university experience comes to light (Geary, 2016). Researchers have recognized that both internal and external factors together ultimately cause students' interactional engagement (Wright & Schartner, 2013; Yefanova, Baird, & Montgomery, 2015). For example, in a study to explore the experiences of international students and domestic students as they interact, Wright and Schartner (2013) found that cross-national interaction is facilitated by "the willingness of both [domestic students] and [international students] to listen" (p.28).

Institutional Commitment to Inclusion

This theme encompasses the university campus environment and its influence on the student experience. It explores whether the institutional approach promotes students inclusiveness, supporting a diverse international student population that strives for a wide range of outcomes. This thesis research shows that a campus culture appreciative of diversity can contribute to international student success. Feeling that university aspires to create a community based on the diversity of views, backgrounds, and needs, where all its members have the responsibility to uphold these values within and between disciplines, as well as feeling secure, welcome and respected seem to be vital elements of the international student experience.

Presumably, students move to a foreign country, in this case New Zealand, to engage with New Zealand education. Thus, it might be difficult to expect the local system to become more congruent with the different approaches of the students' home countries. The question could be "what are the implications of the choice of this country and its form of education?" In this research, students did not indicate having come to New Zealand wanting to be taught or treated as if they were in their own country. There was no implicit or explicit desire to impose their will upon the country's education system or culture. It could be argued that they understand that effort is required for achievement as they move through university, reflecting recognized New Zealand cultural values. There is an implicit understanding among these students that the chosen country will offer opportunities to grow and therefore they have the willingness for learning from this new setting. In this research, students uttered their desire to engage and learn. However, they were quite clear on the challenges that put them at a disadvantage in terms of learning and other perceived important aspects of their university life. This study supports research that highlights the view that if universities embrace international students on their campuses, it is important that they are aware of these students' differences as well as address and accommodate them (Furnham, 2002; Wu et al., 2015).

As previously articulated, this group of international students have multiple characteristics that make them unique. There is evidence that they acknowledge how similar and different they are to other students, either domestic or other international students. It is also clear that is not necessarily their unwillingness to engage and deal with the demands of being a student in a foreign country what unable them to become involved in social exchange with other students; they mentioned the unintentionally or resistance of some people to include them or acknowledge their uniqueness and how their presence can enrich the diversity of university campus and the country. The insights provided by these students suggest that fostering diversity in university has a positive impact on students. What seems to be effective is

offering an international education or experience for everyone, domestic and the so-called international students; this would imply enhancing students' abilities to develop a global mind-set by having a clear way of inspiring them to listen from multiple perspectives and to be familiar with different cultural ways of learning or cultures of learning, which would promote inclusiveness (Bensimon et al., 2016; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017; Museus, 2014; Williams et al., 2005). This is consistent with literature where Martinez-Acosta and Favero (2018) highlight that:

With the number of diverse individuals attending college now, we must offer an environment that is culturally relevant; an environment that is better at listening across cultures. We must offer an environment that acknowledges differences, values them, and as a result, seeks relationships with individuals that have lived different experiences than their own (p.A254).

From the participants' perspective, international students deal with different academic, social, and cultural challenges. Among other things, they need to confront the different ways of thinking and doing of the country where they decided to move to. In order to overcome these challenges, they use different resources that include family, friends, and institutional support services on campus. They also mentioned unique and valuable intrapersonal characteristics, personal qualities that include but are not limited to knowledge, skills, and demographic attributes. The findings imply the importance of looking at and celebrating international students' strengths, being receptive and responsive to their existing competencies with an aim to enhance their experience, including learning outcomes and wellbeing (Dresen et al., 2019; He & Hutson, 2018). There was a considerable amount of evidence in the students' statements to suggest that dedicating efforts to support international students by helping them remediate their "problems", apparent lack of skills and knowledge under the local approach so that they might be successful at university may lead to problematic conclusions. Working under this approach could contribute to confusing assumptions about teaching and learning processes.

It could be argued that being aware of and focusing on the multiple existing differences between local and international students as well as the multiple differences that exist within the so-called international student community seems to work better than having a sort of international oriented approach used to maybe assist international students in performing as domestic students perform. For example, international students might be directly or indirectly expected to adjust to the local higher education system expectations by being required to work collaboratively in group-work and discussions, actively participate in class, show strong critical thinking skills, and engage with lecturers displaying no fear. However, some of these students may not necessarily be comfortable with openly engaging with other students and academic staff, as they lack of confidence due to language limitations, different cultural identity, lack of knowledge about the discussion topics, and fear of discussing taboos or controversial issues. This could lead to having local students dominating class discussions and together with the teaching staff assuming that international students delay their learning by being passive learners, misinterpreting their behaviour. This approach could contribute to the development of the negative stereotype that what negatively affects international students' outcomes the most is that being from a different culture they do not have the skills to undertake study at a higher level.

Literature emphasizes that culture is central to learning and what seems to work is an approach that celebrates and recognizes students' cultures in the many aspects of teaching and learning, and thus enhances access to education for students regardless their background (Young, 2014). These views align with culturally responsive teaching or pedagogy, an approach to teaching that consider the cultural background of students when designing instructional strategies (Samuels, 2018). These views seem to be similar to the stance taken by New Zealand. This country, which has strong bicultural foundations, is committed to diversity. Its education policies acknowledge the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, New

Zealand's founding document. Moreover, the country fosters a culture of integration and inclusion, where everyone has the right to quality education without partiality and discrimination (Harbot, 2017). Based on the country's ideas of integration and respect for all students' differences, it is expected flexibility and responsiveness to its diversity rather than requiring diverse students to fit into a domestic educational system.

Undoubtedly New Zealand as a nation, on an official level, is informed by a sincere multi-cultural tolerance and an earnest desire to be respectful of alien cultural and religious traditions (Kolig, 2003, p.44)

In addition, the University of Canterbury shows its commitment to advancing international education through, among other things, internationalizing the curriculum and increasing its number of students from different cultural backgrounds. As stated in its institutional mission and vision, this university focuses on promoting accessible education, service to community, and inclusion by providing its students equal opportunities to grow. It is committed to enhancing a diverse, culture-rich, and cooperative environment for all its members (see Appendix H). Furthermore, this university embraces the holistic approach to education. Apart from knowledge and learning, the graduate attributes this university intends its students develop through their university years are: bicultural competence, confidence, community engagement, employability, innovation and enterprise, and global awareness. Global awareness includes ways in which international students can share their cultures with domestic students. In other words, domestic students have a great opportunity to have global experiences on campus through engaging with international students (see Appendix I).

The participants in this study looked at the wide range of services to assist international students with problems they may face. They talked about the different academic and non-academic services on offer on campus to enhance their university experience. They highlighted that the impact of staff attitudes and the diverse range of facilities can go beyond enduring the academic burden or helping maximize academic achievement. University staff

with a negative attitude towards international students can clash with students' expectations and needs. Participants recognized the importance of being aware that although the range of services offered can be good, negative employee attitudes and less-than-professional behaviour can have a substantial impact on the service environment.

The findings imply that if a university is serious about making the institutional environment inclusive for international students, providing specific accommodations and interventions that involves actors representing the different areas of campus life is of vital importance, supporting all staff in developing inclusive awareness. This study disclosed the importance of looking at the inclusive and diverse nature of the university as a whole, carrying out a reflection of the institutional practices in place to see if the university considers students differences when delivering services and making decisions. Research has noted the important role that an inclusive approach plays in setting an environment that allows everyone the opportunity to accomplish their goals at university. This requires concerted action, organizational support, and a mixture of different services (Asai & Bauerle, 2016) and as stated by Martinez-Acosta and Favero (2018), "Strategies that promote inclusivity must happen at all levels of the academic ecosystem" (p.A253).

For campus inclusion to be successful, several features are essential. Making new friends can be a difficult thing to do for many people; however, making friends as a student in a new country can be even more challenging. An important notion found in this study was that students valued the campus social scene as an opportunity to engage. Participants in this study highlighted that despite the university efforts to provide opportunities for social engagement, feeling that these opportunities do not contribute fostering a community spirit amongst students, as they do not match their interests, could limit their participation and opportunities to share emotional experiences or feel like they fit in. However, events that occur to encourage awareness and celebration of the rich diversity among the campus

community are valued. Some researchers have dived into the benefits of joining student organizations while at university, highlighting the importance of promoting student participation in these organizations. For example, Foubert and Urbanski's (2006) work pointed out:

a strong association with psychosocial development, particularly on students' establishing and clarifying purpose, educational involvement, career planning, life management, and cultural participation. Although this relationship may be either unidirectional or mutually reinforcing, it is evident that students who are involved in clubs and organizations during their college experience are also those who demonstrate higher levels of development in many areas. (p.180)

Additionally, awareness of international students' financial constraints have relevance with inclusiveness issues. For many of these students coming to a foreign campus represents the first time they live independently and overseas, while some are still financially dependent on their parents. Moreover, some of them may have more financial constraints than others and rely on scholarships to get them through university. Their financial situation can stem from not working while studying, not having a high paying or stable job, being required to pay high academic fees in comparison to domestic student fees, studying in a country where the cost of living could be higher on average than the cost of living in their home countries, or helping family members financially. The benefits of having a scholarship seem to go beyond helping endure the financial burden of studies and further education. They can include allowing students to help fund their studies, covering the costs of living more comfortably, supporting dependent family members.

As shown in this research, while some international students have previous work experience, others have never worked. Their experience determines whether they are at an advantage when applying for jobs. Doubting their own capacities because of their English limitations, being afraid of discrimination, being viewed as a risk by employers, and causing scheduling conflicts seem to be some of the barriers to employment. In addition, not having available

time could stop students from getting a job. For some of them, university is a stressful time that requires a double effort to work on assignments, catching up on readings or studying. Previous research has explored the experience of students who work while study in a foreign university, such as Kwadso's (2014) research that emphasizes on students' motives, nature as well as consequences of working. On this matter, career support offered by university can aid students in their transition to work. Luo (2013) explained that this service contributes connecting academic and social systems, and it helps international students in adjusting to the outside world. This service seems to take value especially when the limited work placement opportunities hinder international students' chances of entering the job market in the foreign country they pursue their university studies. Participants revealed that there is a need for a strong university support in terms of career development due to the limited opportunities in the local market for those international students who are expected to complete an internship as part of the graduation requirements as well as for those wishing to start gaining some international professional experience. There is a need for countering employer concerns about the challenges of international student employees, which might include struggles they could have to fit culturally and communicate in English fluently, as well as having a complex visa situation—struggle to obtain a visa and need to repeat failed papers. This finding resonates with a national study of employers and their perceptions of hiring international graduate students in New Zealand that found some employers, especially those who have not hired international graduates before, tend to see them as a risk (Education New Zealand, 2019).

This study has also shown that international students are vulnerable to develop mental disorders, and the findings recognize the importance of being alert of stressors for international students. Mental health has become a rising concern among international students, and there is evidence in the literature suggesting a greater incidence among them (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016). Life in a foreign country can present so many challenges

to a level where international students feel they cannot totally adjust, and thus, feel intense worry about not doing what they are expected to do. Due to aspects such as high university tuition fees, financial constraints, pressure to succeed at university, and difficulties experienced during the acculturation process, these students are under constant stress and in need of help finding emotional and physical balance. In this regard, offering health services on campus seems convenient to enhance international students' access to health care. Both offering a broad range of health services and having health professionals who engage with international students in a way that results in great trust in the care provided could enhance their accessibility. Skromanis' et al. (2018) work suggests "the need for accessible, targeted, culturally-sensitive health promotion and early intervention programs" (p.1).

Another aspect to consider is support for international students with dependent children. Universities could help these students enhance their university experience by facilitating mechanisms to help them manage study and caring responsibilities, enabling them to negotiate time and space for study. Supports such as childcare can help increase student parents' likelihood to complete their studies (Noll, Reichlin, & Gault, 2017). Furthermore, university staff's commitment to help and flexible attitude towards student parents are seen as vital (Behboodi et al., 2017; Brooks, 2012). Having friendly regulations and being less hostile to these students pursuing university studies while having family commitments can make a big difference in their life and help them thrive. This finding is about relationships, caring connections between student parents and university staff members, which work as a sort of protective mechanism for students who might be at-risk of failure due to their living circumstances (Adu-Yeboah, 2015; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010).

Regarding support for student parents, what has been discussed is not feeling sorry for these students but empathizing with them. The insights provided by students' comments suggest the importance of responsiveness to their needs by making appropriate accommodations to

the instruction and university activities and providing them support that together with their willingness to learn could have a positive impact on their university life and ease their burdens. However, how the university should respond to parent students could be more complex than expected, as being international and parents these students have multiple differences. Not all of them may see their experience in the same way and their needs might vary from one student to another; therefore, openness to making individualized accommodations based on these students' needs seems to be of significant importance.

Additionally, in defining the international student experience the actual physical state of campus and its geographical location are aspects that students valued. They apparently matter to the international undergraduate experience as they influence students' ability to learn and socialize, meeting both their academic and social ambitions. Students might enjoy the university facilities and environment but also liking the place where the university is located can enrich their experience. These participants' comments raise an important question in regard to students' preferences. As Cubillo, Sanchez, and Cerviño (2006) explained: "the dimension of the city, its beauty, the historic background, and the monuments contribute to an excellent environment for interacting with other students, and consequently learning" (p.10). These thoughts seem to be consistent with other research studies on factors that influence international students' choice of university. For example, James-MacEachern and Yun (2017) found that pull motivational factors includes "environmental cues and educational facilities; values in home country; and physical environment and recreational facilities." (p.16).

One aspect that stood out in the data was the university library. A transition to study at a foreign university can involve negotiating unfamiliar library characters, processes or uses. A library attuned to international students' needs seems to be vital in enabling them to become successful library users. The library seems to be not only a place where students can access

resources that support their academic needs but also a place to interact and relax (Waxman, Clemons, Banning, & McKelfresh, 2007). Whether discussing lectures and assignments, or merely a university setting where students can come and sit, chat, and read, there is an appreciation that the library can stand alone in the student community as a gathering place to build community. The library appears to be critical to the various life activities of many international students; public culture is constructed and lived in this space.

The interviewed students also raised the topic of class size and its potential effects on their university experience. Class size seems to influence the chances to develop strong student-lecturer relationships. This relates to the quality of relationships students and lecturers are able to build which includes, but it is not limited to, the amount of individual time lecturers spent with students. Relationship satisfaction with lecturers links to the student's level of confidence and ability to interact with others. A search of the literature found that there is limited and divergent findings about effects of class size on students' learning in higher education (Huxley, Mayo, Peacey, & Richardson, 2018; Wright, Bergom, & Bartholomew, 2019). Additionally, this study supports the notion that although a small class might bring important benefits to the students, class size by itself does not lead to better outcomes. It is also about the lecturers and their readiness to cope with students, their ability to adjust their teaching style to handle diverse students and their preferences as well as maximizing their strengths. In this view, having large classes constitutes an important challenge to both lecturer and student. Students might find it hard to adjust to university life; they transit from high school with small class sizes, and therefore, going into university with lecture classes of hundreds of students could be an important challenge that demands an extreme adjustment.

Academic curriculum was another pertinent issue for participants. Some subjects are harder than others, and the hardness can be found in the level of academic English needed to deal with them. For example, it could be easier for students who have bigger difficulties with the

English language to excel in sciences. Science majors seem to require simplified English language, formal but not complex, as they do not require the use of long sentences or complex vocabulary. Perhaps some students find more challenging degree programmes that require a high level of academic reading and writing due to both their limited English skills as well as their lack of critical thinking skills. They might know how important is analyzing and evaluating while writing but struggle with actually doing it. Researchers have noted several differences between local and international students' writing styles as well as struggles many students face in trying to adapt to the requirements of their academic programmes in the English-speaking University they study (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007; Holmes, 2004).

In relation to university subjects, this study also suggests that having a wide variety of subjects for students to select from helps ensure they study a course which is relevant to their interest and needs, as well as suited to their abilities. Participants also valued the educational system responsiveness to market needs and focus on developing attributes that could enable them complete tasks needed in the role they have not only once qualified but during internships that in many cases are required for graduation. This refers to the importance of student's ability to apply discipline-specific knowledge in practical contexts. Regarding the importance of theoretical and practical knowledge, Wrenn and Wrenn (2009) stated that "the best learning environment is created when these two learning modalities are integrated within a course rather than partitioned throughout multiple courses in the curriculum" (p.258). The findings about university subjects focus on what students identify as important for their transition from university to work and relate to the concept of "Graduate attributes", which refers to a description of the qualities and capabilities that a University community identifies and approves its graduates should develop as part of their university experience (Barrie, 2006; Moalosi, Oladiran, & Uziak, 2012).

This study also raises the topic of the structure of university schedule and its impact on the degree to which university responds to their international students' needs. The statements of some of the participants revealed the value of having flexible schedules that allow students to find a study-life balance. This study points out the need for schedules that align well to students' optimal learning times as well as encourage them to explore their interests inside and outside of lecture halls and the university campus. As described throughout this manuscript, students engage with academic activities but also value non-academic activities. However, in many cases, due to the academic demands they have and the difficulties to cope with university, they need to use extra time for academic purposes, planning ahead for the upcoming academic semester, which in turn can limit their time for pleasure. Research on class scheduling and its impact on academic outcomes has shown that scholars believe that dedicating time to coursework must be a priority; however, others also emphasize the importance of engaging in other non-academic related activities, such as exercising and socializing, for students (Horne, 2000). This finding relates to the idea that success and its components, as explained earlier, vary person to person and comprises many things.

International students form an important part of the university student community. Arriving from a different country, these students may bring different attributes and needs to the group of local students. For example, most of this study's participants are originally from countries where the English language is only taught as a foreign language in school. When students decide to study overseas they move between education systems, which explains the importance of considering the teaching and learning implications of the numbers of international students in the university lectures instead of making assumptions about them. The findings reflected the importance of developing an inclusive classroom culture, teaching practices that values the different contributions of students and promotes their involvement in classroom activities. There was an implicit shared understanding of the value of teaching staff

cultural awareness and their abilities to implement inclusive teaching and learning practices. Cultural differences can lead to unintentional offense, misinterpretations and stress; hence the importance of encouraging awareness of differences between students and display comfort around all of them regardless their differences. When this approach is taken, several benefits could be realized. One benefit for international students could be self-acceptance and acceptance by fellow students. This would also put teaching staff in a better position to understand international students' behaviour as well as difficulties, and thus allocate efforts to find effective ways to address them, ways that need to be tied into course goals and grade-level standards. For example, some lecturers might find it difficult to conceive that students do not look at them when they are speaking or delivering instruction. However, they might respond in a different way if they knew that in some cultures not looking at an authority figure is a sign of respect. Also, some international students come from markedly authoritarian educational systems, so it is alien to them that Western lecturers friendlyly interact with students. Coming from cultures that emphasize memorization of facts, some students struggle with open discussions—they might have not been trained to express their own ideas. Further, as for expressing one's own ideas many students have not developed skills or a habit of critical thinking—identifying, constructing and evaluating arguments.

As the university can be very demanding and challenging, students come across different moments of hardship during their time studying that seem to intensify for students with foreign backgrounds. In this study, participants thought of instructional approaches based on their needs, personalization or customization of learning, and tutoring as an effective strategy to support them academically. The importance of tutoring is not necessarily viewed in terms of helping the “strugglers” but in terms of overcoming teaching gaps that make it difficult to allocate students the time they need and build a strong student-lecturer relationship, which in turns can constrain effective teaching and learning. Another reason why tutoring is such a

good fit among international students seems to be the difficulty that some international students have to connect with fellow students, which reduces these students' chances to ask for academic help. Additionally, the insights provided by the participants' comments suggests the need for Human Resources planning as the university should ensure that tutors in charge of assisting international students academically are provided with training and development needed to fulfil the job but also to monitor and assess their performance. As described in previous research, in many countries, including New Zealand, personalized learning has been promoted as an important part of the education system. Despite the unclear definition of the concept, it has been suggested "that a common aim to the concept of personalized learning is tailoring education to meet students' diverse needs" (Swan, 2017, p.5). Likewise, as shown in its institutional website, the University of Canterbury offers and encourages students to attend tutorials. This study site recognizes this strategy provides students personal assistance with issues that arise from the lectures.

Chapter Summary

Chapter six discussed the research findings in light of current literature. It has shown that international students' understandings of the category international student and the term success in the context of university are complex. The findings suggest that international students present a sort of double identity based on both their perceived similarities and differentness. However, a search of the literature found studies that usually allude to a traditional way of viewing international students as those individuals, members of a homogeneous group, who move overseas mainly for study purposes. Furthermore, although academic achievement and performance refer to popular traditional measures of success found in the literature, the term success seem to relate to personal plans and priorities. In this study, the discussion outlined that the prevailing feeling was that success is a multidimensional term made of interrelated academic and non-academic components.

There are several studies discussing factors influencing international students' chances to succeed at university and some of them are presented as the most common factors. However, literature also suggests the difficulty to find specific success factors as they are contextual. This study analysis demonstrated the existence of multiple interrelated success factors. Students focused on intrapersonal characteristics that include certain demographic attributes: age, gender, religion, marital status, and perceived level of readiness for university. Social support was also of relevance. This comprises quality relationships with various actors: parents, friends, romantic partners, community members, and university staff.

Many students are accustomed to a different teaching and learning style, and their perspective of the world might be different from the one of other students. International students may be argued to be poorly equipped for their time at university in regard to the host country's education approach and expectations, which is a misleading view as being different does not make them limited. This study suggests that a university committed to foster a culture of diversity and inclusion, a culturally responsive university, has a valuable contribution to make to the international student experience. Institutional success factors relate to university efforts to improve both domestic and international students' abilities to develop a global perspective, and make academic and non-academic accommodations to meet its student population needs.

Chapter Seven: Concluding Thoughts

Introduction

Chapter seven is organized into four sections. The first section presents the conclusions derived from the research findings; these conclusions are examined in relation to the questions that guide this study. The second section contains an examination of the implications of this doctoral work, presenting a discussion of what the findings mean to the field as well as an identification of those that may benefit from this information. In this section, I bring my composite subjects – Enrique and Maria – back into the discussion to textualize my final commentaries. The third section presents suggestions for further study based on the new questions that have arisen from this thesis, its findings, and conclusions. The final section provided me the opportunity to share lessons learned and new insights that I gained over the course of this research study.

This inductive qualitative doctoral work was aimed at exploring twelve international students' understandings of their lived realities of what it is like being an international student and what it means to be successful in the context of university. They were supported to express their voice and articulate their lived experience while a detailed thematic analysis was designed to generate understandings. In fact, eliciting these students' views was valuable as their experiences and insights have important implications for practice. This study allowed me to listen to these students' worries, interests as well as needs, and thus produced useful information to help develop university experiences better suited to the population of international students. Much research on international higher education does not structure itself around international students' understandings or concepts of the category international and what defines success at university. Listening to students' voices allowed a

reconceptualization of the issue, rather than just a response to the issue. This heterogeneous group of international students had articulated views concerning their university life in New Zealand, demonstrating their competence to engage in the data collection process and provide rich insight into their experience as international students.

Leaving home to live and pursue studies overseas can be an enriching but also a difficult experience. International students might move of their own free will, with expectations and in search of a future, but their journeys include excising part of their past. When these students leave home, some of them for the first time, they leave part of themselves behind—family, friends, customs, etc.—which can come at a painful price. While for some international students mobility brings good memories, others experience vulnerability. Many of them face a number of challenges that include, but are not limited to, the cultural shock experienced while integrating into the new higher education system and adjusting to their new setting. These students also face global challenges, which can be more difficult to cope with being in a different part of the world.

While some of these challenges are common, as many of these students are likely to undergo them, others are more individual and dependent on which type of international student they are. Furthermore, there are myriad aspects that can contribute to helping international students settle into the host country and have a more positive experience. Every international student is an individual with specific characteristics and understandings, and their needs are paramount when the time comes that they leave their home countries. International students' needs have to be revised to guarantee they are provided the support they need at the right time and consistency is necessary in terms of how the support is provided.

Revisiting the Research Questions

In this section, I refer back to the three original research questions this doctoral work set out to answer and draw conclusions deriving from the evidence and various aspects discussed in this work.

RQ1: What does it mean to be an international student?

Research shows that the concept of international student has traditionally been associated with mobility of students across borders and the existing understanding of the term international student seems to gloss over the diversity within the so-called international student group, leading to the reification of international students as homogeneous group. However, this study findings suggest that the term international student is multidimensional and complex. Although when defining this term people might be quick to assume that its official designation is based on the student's visa status and hence enrolment status, international students do not necessarily have the same understandings of the term.

A way to stop overlooking the complexities of being an international student is moving beyond viewing them as simply homogeneous group. These students' identity has a sort of double sense that influences how they perceive themselves. On the one hand, they identify with each other on the basis of a belief of common characteristics. These students shared a similarity of pursuing studies in a nation other than their own and holding a visa that allows them to enrol at university and imposes them certain restrictions. On the other hand, they have particular characteristics such as background, life experience, demographic attributes and university readiness level, which make them different from some and similar to others within the so-called group of international students. An interesting finding is that among the common aspects that characterize international students, their sense of "differentness" serves

as a source of connection as some have a mutual understanding of what it is like to be different from others.

The degree of cultural similarity or dissimilarity between the host and home culture defines the challenges international students may face, which in turn influences how they perceive themselves. International students who come from backgrounds similar to those of local students – mainly Western students – appear to encounter fewer challenges. They have more possibilities to engage themselves in the host country's culture and coping better with university life than other international students. This in turn contributes to some students feeling more like local themselves rather than international. However, others find more problems and the foremost one seems to be dealing with things that clash with their cultural differentness, creating cultural conflict. These students showcase behaviour different from local people and recognize they come from elsewhere. Then while some international students feel at home in a foreign land others feel like foreigners.

Stereotypes play a role in defining who international students are. They shape identity and sometimes can lead to unfair perceptions of international students. Not only stereotypes that local people might have about international students but also stereotypes that international students have about themselves and other peers influence the meaning attributed to the term.

RQ2: What does it mean to be successful at university?

The concept of success has commonly been referred to in the literature as academic achievement or performance as educational performance indicators seem to help universities objectively evidence students learning. However, more recent studies highlight that success should not be viewed as rigid. This research study suggests that having a single definition of the term success at university for international students is a difficult task to accomplish. As I

have demonstrated through my research, it could be argued that the term does not only mean something different to different students but also one-dimensional measures cannot define it.

Success involves setting and having individual goals. Different international students prioritize different things, academic and non-academic. Further, these students may have various goals that compete for their attention. Their different goals, shaped by internal and external factors, guide their decisions on the approach to take for university and on what they look for during their university life. In addition, when students do not feel they are capable of producing desired outcomes, they might resist facing related challenges. They might not have control over the challenging situation, but a choice about how they view it. This might explain, for example, why some international students interact with local students or engage with local life, while others focus more on their academic duties and mainly socialize with people from their own country of birth or other international students who face similar challenges.

While using academic indicators measured through academic performance or achievement can help explain students' success, a broader measure of international student success, a multidimensional measure, could help capture the complexity of this term. International students are individuals with different and simultaneous goals, so giving too much emphasis to narrow aspects can lead to overshadowing other equally important students' priorities and restricting students' opportunities to balance their multiple goals. This study has reinforced the need for a comprehensive approach and understanding the international student as a whole person, which implies focusing on the holistic development of the student as compared to only the acquisition of content knowledge that is taught and learned in academic courses.

RQ3: Which aspects, and to what extent, influence success?

Factors found to be influencing success have been explored in several research studies, but given their complexity, others might have not been studied. Also, there is a lack of literature that focuses on success factors among international students. This study highlights the complexity of what influences international student success. Defining success factors as single over-simplifies the complex interactions of at least three dimensions: personal characteristics, networks of relationships among people, and institutional arrangements. Although success factors can vary greatly from one student to another, this qualitative analysis found certain features related to each of these dimensions.

Personal characteristics include age, parental status, and readiness for university. Both mature and younger students have advantages and disadvantages. Despite age differences, collaborating work can unlock students' great potential. Furthermore, parenting brings benefits but also a bearing on achieving study-life balance. Another personal characteristic is students' readiness for university, which involves aspects such as skills and knowledge, knowing what to expect of university, emotional preparedness, awareness of English limitations, intelligence, and academic drive.

Quality interactions with parents, friends, romantic partners, university staff, and members of local communities have the potential to influence international students' abilities to cope with different stressors. Feeling others care about your university journey and as about you as an individual matters. However, sometimes the stresses in the international student's life can come from these actors. Although parents can provide different types of support, parental expectations for academic performance over which students may not have total control could lead to issues with the students' mental health. Furthermore, friendship networks seems to impact international students' success. Regardless their interests and efforts, some

international students do not have every chance to make friends, especially with Western people, during their studies as maybe everyone else. Different obstacles get in the way as they try to build strong friendships, and lack of cross-cultural competence seems to be one of them. Engaging with local religious communities helps build connections that influence different aspects of the international student life such as academic life, social life, and mental health. In terms of having a romantic relationship whilst at university, it should not be underestimated as this can cause both positive and negative effects. It can interfere with academic responsibilities, cause financial hardship, and have both a positive and negative emotional effect on students. Moreover, developing positive relationships between students and staff can be beneficial across the university environment.

Fostering diversity at university has a positive impact on international students. In this sense, working under the approach that the international education or experience is offered to all the students, regardless if they are local or international, can positively influence the international student experience. This implies promoting intercultural competence, enhancing all students' abilities to learn from and respect different cultures. Further, the multiple challenges international students face do not make them deficient. International students have knowledge and skills developed through pre departure experiences. Valuing their strengths instead of ignoring their existing capacities and looking to remediate apparent problems positively affect people's expectations of them and services. A responsive paradigm facilitates mechanisms to accommodate different ways of teaching and multiple needs students have.

International students are influenced by different contacts with the university, and therefore it seems vital to contemplate each interaction the university has with an international student when looking at what academic and non-academic services to provide. Positive non-academic arrangements include intramural social events that encourage international representativeness, awareness of international students' financial constraints, and mental

health services on campus. They also include on-campus childcare as well as flexible regulations and attitude towards student parents, campus libraries that help to build community, career support to aid the students' university-to-work transition; and modern facilities located in a place that offers a pleasant environment to study and engage.

Additionally, positive institutional academic arrangements include personalized learning through trained tutors, inclusive teaching and learning practices, a wide range of courses to choose from, theoretical and practical knowledge, schedule flexibility to allow students explore their different interests, class size that enhances relationships, and awareness of courses difficulty.

The findings of this study have shown that not only universities or other external stakeholders but also students themselves are accountable for their success. Although external factors influence the student success, it is also about international students taking an active role in their university life by, for example, making choices that could lead them toward achieving the maximum benefit from their experience.

Implications for Practice

While this study was conducted in one university of New Zealand, it is of broad relevance. Its potential contribution to knowledge and the issues addressed are of particular interest to New Zealand but also extend to other contexts and the international research community. The study generated useful qualitative knowledge to help develop strategies for improving international student success based on a comprehensive approach to address students' distinctive needs.

This study's analytical process provided a basis for assisting current and future international students in reflecting on their expectations and experience. The more reflection they do, the more prepared to negotiate their issues they may be. By immersing into a reflective practice,

international students may enable themselves to build up knowledge of what their strengths are, abilities they need to develop, challenges, and opportunities made available to them. This reflective process could increase their self-awareness and help them in developing a better understanding of their own experience, and in turn enable them to take action and gain more control over their university life and ability to reach their goals.

There are also implications for university staff as the study explored aspects of international education that could be tackled differently. The research identified conditions for improving the likelihood of international student success, a basis for helping faculty and administrators put accommodations in place for international students and develop strategies to address their needs and expectations.

This study emphasizes that not only university representatives and other actors outside the academic environment can help international students enhance their own distinctive set of attributes and overcome challenges, but also international students themselves can take an active role in their university life by seeking opportunities and making choices that help them move forward towards their individual goals. Something to be aware of is that some students are better than others at seeking out help. The study suggests that different stakeholders should be concerned about international student success and reveals the following four main implications for practice.

Preparing students and parents for university life in New Zealand. This study suggests that one of the components of university readiness is students' information about what to expect of university before they commence university. In this sense, having in depth insights is a precondition to make informed choices and decisions over university.

Furthermore, as suggested in this study, parental involvement and interest in the international student's university life has an important influence on the student success. Parents can

support their university students in many different ways but also have expectations for them that sometimes are unrealistic or set too high, being difficult for the students to deal with pressure from their parents. Not achieving parents' expectations can prompt stress among international students. For example, Maria is facing important challenges studying in a foreign country as she is struggling with both her academic and social life. Her parents, who did not let her study something she likes, aim too high for her and push her to excel academically. Maria feels pressured as her parents who probably lack familiarity with the host education system or lack international exposure do not understand how difficult it is for her to cope with the challenges of pursuing studies in a foreign university. She struggles understanding the lecturers and course materials, with academic writing, and with group work. Therefore, clarity of what to expect of university or being able to understand clearly the facts that the university puts forward is important for both students and parents. This would help them develop realistic expectations and put them in a better position to cope with the challenges of living in a foreign country.

Accurate information and quality guidance offered by university recruiters, including authorized agents, would help equip international students and their parents for university. One way to accomplish this purpose is facilitating myriad resources at the international students and their parents' disposal, giving full and frank disclosure of all information relevant to the student. The resources could include websites with user-friendly layouts and insights of those students who have already been through the process. International students have variable levels of English proficiency and this language can be a barrier for many of them; therefore, putting information in layman's terms could help boost their comprehension. Besides this, supervising recruiters to guarantee ethical recruitment and the student's interest would avoid students and parents' unrealistic expectations. Furthermore, it could be useful to

plan recruitment strategies based on a comprehensive understanding of cultural differences and on what students and their parents really need to know.

As shown in this study, the experiences that sharing a similar or different culture to the host culture afford can affect international students' social, affective, and academic development. The challenges they face, mainly related to cultural differences, as well as the derived fears weaken their cognitive capacity and learning process. They also influence the affective quality of relationships and engagement, affecting students' ability to develop strong attachments. It may help to offer information not only about available student services or important dates. Students need to know about potential challenges they are likely to face, for example, the difficulty to make friends, understand native English speakers, find suitable internships, or engage with local community; also, they need guidance on potential ways to cope with these challenges. This would ensure that the experience on offer is appropriate for the students' expectations, English language proficiency, academic and social capability, among other things.

Encouraging parents to become well-informed about the demands and challenges of studying in a foreign country could avoid them having unrealistic expectations and create awareness among them of how to support their students without causing them stress. University recruiters could give great weight to outreach for parents. This could be done by exploring with current international students parents' mind-sets about pursuing university studies in a foreign country, their concerns and priorities that possibly depend on their cultural background. Parents can be segmented on the basis of their potential expectations, customizing communications and approaches accordingly. In addition, the institutional website could contain relevant information to parents in a specific parents section.

Promoting intercultural competence. Although international students share certain features that identify them as homogeneous group, they are highly heterogeneous. Enrique and Maria gave a few examples. Maria mentioned sharing certain characteristics with other international students such as facing similar challenges due to their status as international students. Enrique clearly feels he looks different to many other students, whether they are domestic or international, not only because of his physical appearance but also because of his unique cultural background.

The university staff and students may be aware of how diverse the university campus can be; however, what many of them may not realize is that some international students feel negatively about their university experience if their individual differentness are not addressed and respected. In this regard, positive student-staff and student-student relationships are key for the successful integration of international students. Negative attitudes towards international students can create an atmosphere of distrust among them. Therefore, it is imperative that students as well as other institutional actors appreciate the diversity from each other. For example, both Enrique and Maria want to build their social network on campus; however, they have not achieved this goal as they have issues to interact with some students who lack interest in intercultural interactions. They mentioned having not many close local or Western friends, although they would like to have more and meaningful interactions with them. Enrique also felt that at times he feels a disconnection with university staff.

Promoting intercultural competency relates to the theories of inclusion and has a contribution to make here in that its goal is to give each student, international or not, self-worth. As international students represent different countries and cultures, encouraging development or fostering a global mind-set in both international and local students and staff seems to be of most importance in creating an inclusive university environment. Such effort could include developing intercultural competence to engage with international and domestic individuals

through training. International undergraduate representatives could be involved in planning, implementing and evaluating these initiatives.

Understanding and valuing all types of diversity could be also shown by the degree all forms of equality is promoted in the classroom. For example, directly or indirectly making international students assimilate in to the host pedagogic culture could be a source of exclusion, an outdated approach. Conversely, valuing international students' differentness and heterogeneity aligns well with an inclusive approach to be taken by universities. The recommendations emphasize the importance of assuring that both students and lecturers enhance their ability to understand that people from different backgrounds hold different views of aspects such as appropriate student-lecturer relationships, learning styles, expectations of university, learning needs, etcetera. Enrique expressed this sentiment. He mentioned that some course topics make him feel uncomfortable as they are prohibited by the society he comes from. Also, in his country, there is a sort of culture of silence and students are actively encouraged to listen to the lecturers. In his country, students are not on a first-name basis with their lecturers as the country does not follow a laid-back approach.

It would be beneficial to make sure that course content relates to cultural aspects of the international context and promotes intercultural interactions. Also, it is seemingly important to provide a wide range of courses, flexibility in study choices, a mixture of practical and theoretical knowledge to help with career development, and timetables that encourage students to explore their interests. It is equally important to provide personalized academic assistance through tutoring, which requires fully trained tutors and lecturers monitoring their performance. In addition, awareness of the students' confidence level in instructional modes that include collaborative learning and active learning involvement could help adjust the support given.

Furthermore, this study suggests that social activities on campus organized by university or particular student clubs help connecting international students to the university world; a focus on promoting representativeness of culturally diverse students in events organized in university could enhance their participation. It would be beneficial to promote intercultural contact by identifying shared interests between students, local and international, as well as designing social activities to encourage cooperative work between them. What this study emphasizes is the importance of creating an environment that inspires frequent intercultural interaction in both inside and outside the lecture theatres, promoting cultural inclusiveness. Maria believes that not sharing the same social interests with other students stops her from joining some student clubs whose members are mainly local students. However, she thinks that university clubs have the potential to offer international students like her a great opportunity to socialize.

Understanding the heterogeneity found in the context of the university would help with making a segmentation of the international student population, useful information for needs assessment. In addition, identifying the key distinctions and aspects that establish the degree of perceived service quality among the different segments could be important when designing recruitment strategies and support services for international students. A realistic account of the university's population could lead to strategies devised to supply the international student market with what it demands, meeting their different needs.

There is demand for student support services, academic and non-academic; however, it is of vital importance that international student service staff are able to engage international students on the system and reach out those students. Some international students may find it difficult to reach the services due to different barriers. For example, Maria struggles significantly with English while Enrique may not want to use some services as he had a prior bad experience. He did not feel he was listened to or treated fairly when being given the

service. In order to improve access to university services, one of the recommendations is to assure services are linguistically and culturally appropriate.

Understanding the multidimensional nature of success. This study has reinforced the need for the term success to be understood as multidimensional and deeply individual. While thinking of success along one metric—academic achievement—seems to be common in academic circles, this view is not complete. International students have different goals that include, but are not limited to, academic achievement. They need to be able to balance their multiple and simultaneous goals. Thus, attention needs to be given to reflect on whether institutional mission statements are broad enough to include a diverse variety of perspectives and encourage all the institutional actors to use various metrics of success. A whole student approach to education is vital, channelling efforts to provide the basis for each student to fulfill their potential. This approach should not divorce itself from academic success but expand what could constitute it, focusing attention on different attributes. Refocusing strategies for international students in university, helping the development of the whole student, should be based on reflecting on what is the purpose of international higher education and who it does primarily serve.

Referring back to Maria's story, she is studying something she does not like, so the question could be "do her grades really define her?" Maria studies hard as she does not want to disappoint her parents, who have high expectations of her. Her grades are important, but are they the only things she cares about? What else matters to her? She mentioned that thinking about gaining a greater knowledge of different cultures, improving her English skills, and connecting with people from around the world excite her. Maria implicitly described what some of her multiple success priorities are. With regard to strategies to address international students' priorities, international students' needs assessment data could inform institutional strategic decisions.

Comprehensive and responsive student support. Students in this research highlighted that it helps to know that the university offers a wide range of academic and non-academic services to support international students in achieving success and tackling the many challenges they may face.

Being an international mature age or young student have both advantages and disadvantages, therefore, fostering connections between them would benefit both. Enrique, who is a mature student in his 30's, mentioned having family responsibilities, facing problems with getting back into the mind-set of studying, and finding it difficult to engage as he encounters a university culture dominated by younger students. However, Enrique is confident to say that he has a wide range of experience and a higher level of maturity and responsibility that probably younger students do not have. So focusing on strength-based development, valuing both mature and young students and their strengths, could potentially boost their confidence at university. Developing peer support programs could encourage mature age and younger students to meet, explore their competences, and teach each other, inspiring supportive networks in university. This initiative would offer a platform for exchanges across age divisions and in building intergenerational ties in university. This would challenge age segregation and promote an age-friendly environment.

As some international students struggle to deal with colloquial English as well as native and non-native accents, they may need English language support. For example, although Maria met the English proficiency requirement for the qualification she enrolled in, she mentioned language difficulty as one of the most critical issues she faces as an international student. Her struggles with English, which sometimes demands her to work harder than other students to try to achieve her goals at university, create social and academic issues for her as probably for other international students too. Henceforth a strategy to assist students like Maria could be to host sessions where students are given the chance to become familiar with colloquial

English, expressions and slang words, as well as the mores and norms of the local society.

This support could potentially help students develop language skills to communicate successfully in different settings, both inside and outside university.

English testing is central for a university that admits non-native English speakers; standardized tests allow universities getting information of the student's English language abilities. However, as shown in this study, a simple overview of a prospect student's English skills seems not to be enough. As an additional step to measure students' English language skills, having a second English tests, as part of the enrolment requirements and upon arrival, could help with placing non-native English speaking students who struggle communicating into special English courses. What could be helpful is testing language skills relevant to the student's field of study as well as comprehensive tests that measure the student's command of both formal and informal English.

Furthermore, in terms of developing English language skills, students themselves are an important piece of the puzzle. Taking a central role in their own learning by targeting and developing a plan to reinforce their weaknesses in the English language prior to their departure and during their stay at university could help. Technology could be useful for that purpose, as it has become central in our everyday lives and the learning process. It offers unlimited technological materials to language learners and some of them are free language-learning platforms. The university could help in identifying them and point students in the direction of valuable resources for academic and non-academic purposes. It would also be important to develop a students' guide to academic English as well as having it available online. Thinking about Maria, she could have started preparing or have better prepared herself before she arrived by learning from Websites and using learning English apps but also by participating in electronic discussions, reading books, watching movies, having an English speaking partner, etcetera.

Although the library's space might have traditionally operated as a repository, it is apparent from the study that the library is a space not only for studying but also for engaging, it is a sort of social academic space. Enrique could spend hours in the library studying alone but also in groups. He finds the place relaxing and going to the library as an opportunity for socialization. On-campus libraries offer a space for building community, making relationships, and therefore they could be a link to the community of students. Library staff could get involved in promoting activities to enhance student engagement, building positive relationships between students, and supporting them by sharing useful information. They could provide advice and guidance, connecting students to different services. Furthermore, due to its role in community development, when designing the library space, it is vital to rethink how to offer students the space or venue they need to better interact in a more informal setting.

This study has shown that international students can be vulnerable to developing different mental disorders due to their exposure to multiple stressors. Maria, for example, is an international student experiencing poor mental health. She struggles with her mental health for many reasons. Maria has experienced discrimination on-campus and off-campus, verbally and physically. Further, she has problems in academic areas such as understanding lectures and participating in group work due to issues with English proficiency. Therefore, in order to keep up with her classes, she needs to work harder than other students to try to get good results. Her parents, who do not necessarily understand how difficult it is for her to cope with all these stressors, have high expectations for her, but maybe too high or unrealistic.

Although she tries her best, she never seems to be able to meet them. It is a lot of stress for her. She has thought of withdrawing university and returning home, but she is afraid of her family's reaction. This is an example that clearly shows the importance of promoting mental health in universities and responding effectively to international students' mental health

needs. Accommodations need to be put in place for international students to help them enhance skills for adaptive and positive behaviour. University mental health initiatives could focus on managing sleep, anxiety, nutrition, finances, fears, depression, anger, time, academic pressure, family pressure, and love relationships; also, living with different types of people and outside of your comfort zone, living by yourself for the first time, and finding a social niche. In addition, as some international students find it hard to manage emotional distress, social and emotional education as a complement to student counselling would help with understanding and managing their emotions. Moreover, emotional education could help students to feel and show empathy for others regardless their differences, being able to establish and maintain positive relationships.

Due to the common overwhelming experience of discrimination against international students and in many cases ineffective support in addressing the problem, another important service to consider is a discrimination legal service, a complaint handling service that inspects complaints of discrimination towards international students. A team of experts in discrimination law, international students' rights, and discrimination claims could be in charge of overseeing all discrimination incidents across and outside university, addressing both formal and informal complaints thoroughly to guarantee a discrimination-free environment. This should include encouraging international students to seek guidance and, in the case of experiencing such behaviour, to seek resolution. Students need honest and impartial advice, and information discussed in plain English without legal jargon. Providing this service would potentially help stop or control discrimination, hold those responsible to account and ensure international students are able to complete their university studies free from any humiliating treatment. Universities could take action against discrimination and their efforts could be located on campus and in society. The university should have a strong an influencing presence in terms of challenging hegemonic representations regarding race

and cultural difference, rooted in society, by stressing ideas of respect. University's efforts could include joining or leading local and national initiatives. Maria has experienced discrimination both inside and outside university campus. She shared these devastating experiences with some people such as her parents and friends, although nobody actually empathized with her. Maria feels nobody helped her to take steps towards sorting out these issues. If she had more support, she would feel more at ease as well as encouraged to keep pursuing her plans of making friends and enjoying the local culture. Instead, she fully focuses on her studies as she feels it is easier for her to control her grades by studying hard rather than trying to accomplish her other goals.

This study also found that parenting while in university can hinder study-life balance; however, the university can alleviate struggles student parents face. Mainstreaming student parents' challenges and needs into policies could make an important difference to their university experience. Support for student parents could include not only affordable and on-site childcare provision but also flexibility in meeting the needs of parent students; flexibility implies approachable lecturers, less arbitrary deadlines, and a flexible approach to poor attendance and punctuality.

Research Population and Generalizability

Being representative of the views of all international students was not the aim of this study. As explained in chapter three, this qualitative study was designed to provide a rich and contextualized understanding of success at university through in depth interviews with a small sample of twelve international students from one university in Aotearoa New Zealand. This one university is in a country with a Treaty-based commitment to biculturalism, a form of biculturalism that includes people from all parts of the globe. The sample was selected based on its capacity to facilitate understanding of the meaning that these students ascribe to

their experiences, prioritizing the interpretation over the generalization of this study's findings. Further related research could consider a larger sample at different contexts to help generalize the findings to the international student population.

I am aware that the concept of generalizability, usually used to evaluate rigor in quantitative studies, relates to the extent to which the results of a study can be broadly applied (Polit & Beck, 2010). However, some of my research findings might be generalizable. I am not talking about statistical generalizability or generalizability with a quantitative meaning, but what I refer to is the extent to which the knowledge generated within this qualitative study could be exported to help explain the experiences of other international students within New Zealand or other settings.

In this study, I facilitated generalizability through presenting the findings in depth, as well as implementing other strategies to assure trustworthiness and creating narratives that bring the data to life and, in the process, can bring resonance for readers. The readers can also take an active role in making generalizations. Their engagement with what this study presents can lead them to support the findings as generalizable.

As final recipient and arbiter, and thanks to the thick details of the phenomena under investigation provided by the author..., the reader can justify the extrapolation and application of the findings to other settings and situations, thus making transferability inferences (Carminati, 2018, p. 2099)

Regarding the role that the readers can play in making generalizations, I consider two types of generalizability: naturalistic and inferential generalizability. Naturalistic generalizability relates to similarities the readers find between the in depth interpretations presented in the study and their own experiences while inferential generalizability depends on to what extent the readers believe they can transfer the research findings to other settings (Smith, 2018).

Suggestions for Future Research

This research study was successful in generating rich qualitative data about a group of international students' perspectives of success at university, although it has limitations worth noting. In this section, I present some suggestions for future research that arose out of the limitations I have identified in this study.

Due to the increasing population of international students in Aotearoa New Zealand and other parts of the world, more research that focuses on this population should be carried out.

Scholars should attempt to better understand issues that relate to international education and effective ways of working with international students by engaging with students' voices. I see this approach as a way not only to open up opportunities to international students to become more visible within their universities but also to explore their particular perspectives on their university experience as well as the categories international and success, which others might not share.

Other stakeholders in higher education are faculty, staff, and administrators; research that understands these players and how effective they are in fostering success could also be of vital importance. Exploring, comparing, and contrasting higher education stakeholder perspectives would identify if their positions on international education dispose them to pursue differing or similar interests and goals. What is of most importance is for those views not only to be heard but also acted upon.

This study chose semi-structured interviews as the primary method for data collection, relying on interviewees' accuracy and willingness to share their thoughts and details about their experience. Further studies could consider that the researcher's presence during data collection could affect the participants' responses. In this study, although the participants appeared to be comfortable in sharing their personal experiences with me, I am aware that

they could omit or exaggerate vital details. They could also provide biased response by, for example, choosing responses they believed were favourable to me or more socially acceptable rather than their truthful response. Furthermore, the interviews were entirely conducted in English, and participants seemed to speak English confidently during the interviews. However, I got the sense that some of the non-native English-speaking participants would have found it easier to articulate their ideas, express themselves and their emotions with more intensity, in their native tongue. Although non-native English speakers were also invited to write their ideas in the language of their preference and use this writing to help explain their ideas, only a few of them did so.

I finished my data collection before the mass shootings occurred at mosques in a terrorist attack in Christchurch, the city where this study took place, and the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study argues that international students face different and multiple challenges as they pursue higher education in a foreign country that can affect different areas of their lives. Further, the experience of studying and living overseas has been the first time many international students have left their home countries and moved overseas, and, among other things, not all of them are equally equipped for the challenges associated with their overseas experience and end feeling overwhelmed. The Christchurch tragedy and the dramatic effects of COVID-19 outbreak could have increased the challenges these students face during university life, which has probably become something they never could have imagined. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore how those two tragic experiences affected international students' university life and their success at university. Studies related to the Christchurch tragedy could have a national scope while studies on the COVID19 pandemic could be of broader relevance.

The cultural values dominating in their respective countries link to the way international students think, feel or act. It would be pertinent to carry out cross-cultural research on

cultural influences that affect individual behaviour. This type of research would enable examining unique cultural characteristics and traits, in an effort to identify patterns between various cultures. It would help analyze how students diverge or converge in the set of values they use to make decisions regarding their university experience.

Although this study identified some success factors, it did not identify which ones are the most impactful or whether they become less or more important at different times or stages of the student experience. With the aim to investigate whether these factors are dynamic and evolve through different cycles, a longitudinal study design would be useful. Knowing more about them could help identify areas for improvement. Moreover, as there appear to be multiple and interrelated factors, it would be interesting if researchers design studies that look at the exact link between them and international student success.

My study found that this group of international students were prone to mental health issues throughout their university life. They expressed being exposed to various stressors, such as moving abroad and far from home for the first time, leaving behind their support systems, taking full responsibility for own needs and adjusting to a new environment and conditions. However, there was variation in their responses to stress and adversities. It would be worthwhile to examine how students manage the various sources of stress, their strategies, coping mechanisms and resilience. Further studies could expand on this and reveal more insights into the nature and extent of international students' mental health issues. Studies could go further and explore what type of support they need and if they, when given support, have an increased chance of success as to those who do not have any mental health issue.

Personal Insight

An image may be immediately obvious but there might be things that you may not notice unless I point them out. Knowing the background and listening to the actors involved help

with better understanding what a picture really shows. The shadows in the image I used to start this dissertation are not simply shadows. There are incredible stories behind them, which are stories of international students whose individual characteristics make them different as well as similar to other students.

I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to listen to the experiences of these twelve students for the purpose of this doctoral work. I consider that eliciting the voice of students in qualitative research plays an important role in gaining insight into their lived experience and interpretations, which may be overlooked or hardly revealed by research. I feel that international students' insights on success merit attention for the reason that they are the first level consumers of the international student experience. Although people in charge of teaching or doing research on international education may consider themselves the experts, the international students are the ones who experience life in a country other than their own and face the multiple challenges that brings about.

I have learned from my research participants that some might speak of a community of international students, ensembles of individuals who apparently share specific characteristics and connections with each other. From this view, for example, the community of international students consists of all those students at the university who are outside of their country of origin, are exposed to another culture (host), and look utterly different from domestic students. However, international students do not necessarily belong to a single group; the ensembles bring together heterogeneous individuals who might not engage with each other or have a common identity form, share a single set of cultural values, or have a specific social structure that manages the behaviour of all the group members.

Being a student is a challenge but undertaking studies in a different country could be even a bigger challenge. It has been over four years since I first landed in New Zealand. I have been

exposed to different experiences, some more pleasant than others. My journey has not been as difficult as it has probably been to other international students maybe due to my readiness to pursue university studies overseas, which I attribute to the skills and knowledge I developed through previous experiences; also, personality traits, maturity level, and age. However, there are challenges that I have seen other international students face and I believe many international students are likely to experience them when moving to a foreign country. Some of these challenges can be universal in the sense that every international student will go through them while others are more specific as depend on the individual student and its personal characteristics.

No one wants to hear the frightening news that something is not right but we cannot always foresee when these things will occur. A challenge can mean something different to each and every international student. The totality or some aspects of a challenge may not happen to other students; some students may face challenges early on in their university lives while others may face them later; some challenges may be more difficult to overcome than others; and some may be challenges for some students, and for others they may never happen. Some might find it hard to be an international student but for others it could be an enlightening experience. This study reinforces the idea that valuing students' differentness is a valid and updated approach, idea that aligns well with an inclusive approach.

Facing problems and struggles while being far from home, family, and social support network can increase levels of stress and anxiety that may scramble your brain and make it difficult to function. It happened to me. For example, one day, I was unexpectedly informed that my parents, who live in Peru, were very sick; another day, I was the one severely sick. In situations like these ones, there is likely to be many thoughts running through your mind, being hard to work out what to do, stay focused, and make the most out of your university experience. You may find it helpful to talk your issues through with someone else but

sometimes you do not feel you have the social and expert support you need. You understand what the situation is but have many questions that are difficult to answer: What to do? Is it better to go back home or go somewhere else? Is this something I can really do or deal with? How will it affect my university experience? How to feel ease and calm? Who could help me? Where I can find help?

During my PhD journey, we had two big unfortunate events that marked a pivotal point in my university experience. Some people were killed in shooting attacks during prayer time at mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, and others were severely injured. Another fatal event was the COVID-19 outbreak, a virus causing severe lung infection everywhere in the world; people were known to have died from this fast-spreading virus. We heard about how big these events were and all the damage and loss associated to them, which caused and spread fear. These traumatic experiences aroused disturbing feelings in me as well as in other international students.

I am writing these lines while the whole world is suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic. As this virus continues to spread across the world, anxiety amid the infamous coronavirus invaded me. My home country, the country where I currently live, and many other countries are in lockdown; we have been told to take good care of ourselves. The thought of being powerless is frightening and I cannot avoid feeling fearful. I have the fear of knowing family members, friends, or myself could be infected. Also, I think about my present and my future, my plans and what will happen to them. When I moved to New Zealand, I had many goals and I have been working for the past almost five years to achieve them; however, they may need to change and this is an upsetting situation. But here I am using all my strength to complete my dissertation.

Another thing that I have also learned is that as international students carry different aspirations and dreams, and thus being successful at university can have different meanings to different students. Thus, as demonstrated in this study, gaining an in depth understanding of these students' perspectives on their university experience contribute with knowledge to put in place accommodations aimed at enhancing the international student experience. It is useful for university representatives to understand international students' perspectives and for international students to reflect on their own experience in order to co-create an authentic and meaningful international experience.

This doctoral work has been for me a learning journey as has transformed me in many important ways. My position on research comes from a personal need to know the world in depth. When the time came to choose a methodology, I asked myself: "What do I really need and want to do that could engage me for few years and generate a deep understanding of success at university? What do I want to do that could chart the direction of my future career?" I decided that for my dissertation, I would do a qualitative study. My academic supervisors guided me in choosing a research methodology that best matched my research purpose and questions. My study has given me the opportunity to engage with the world of international students more actively in order to understand it better. Over these years, I have realized the value of and moved towards the idea of research as seeking for what is meaningful to the individuals by focusing on their interpretations, rather than limiting myself to an objective stance and seeking for objective information. This study has challenged my intellectual skills; it has driven me beyond my own academic boundaries to what was for me an unfamiliar territory.

The interaction with my supervisors was a vital part of my doctoral studies. I began my PhD journey with no exact understanding of how I was going to carry out my study and simply having in mind a potential research topic but determination and enthusiasm. My academic

supervisors have so much expertise in the field surrounding my research. They constantly guided and evaluated my work and progress, encouraging me to take independent decisions about my research study. They provided me consistent and valuable reviews and criticism of my analytical writing, which helped me with improving the quality of my manuscripts. Their feedback was incredibly helpful to me. We developed a good supervisor-student relationship, an effective and efficient relationship. They were always approachable, friendly, very supportive and positive; they stimulated my enthusiasm for research.

This study not only resonates with other studies in the field of international higher education but also goes beyond the existing literature. Its particular contribution is in the detailed account that the participants provided about their personal journeys. The study helped not only gaining unique insights into international students' perspectives but also made valuable suggestions on conditions and changes that might enhance these students' chances of success at university.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Data on International Students in Higher Education

Report

Participation in higher education is growing in the world. For example, as shown in Figure 1, between 2005 and 2013, the number of people with a tertiary qualification increased by 45 percent in OECD and G20 countries, being estimated to keep increasing by 2030 (OECD, 2015).

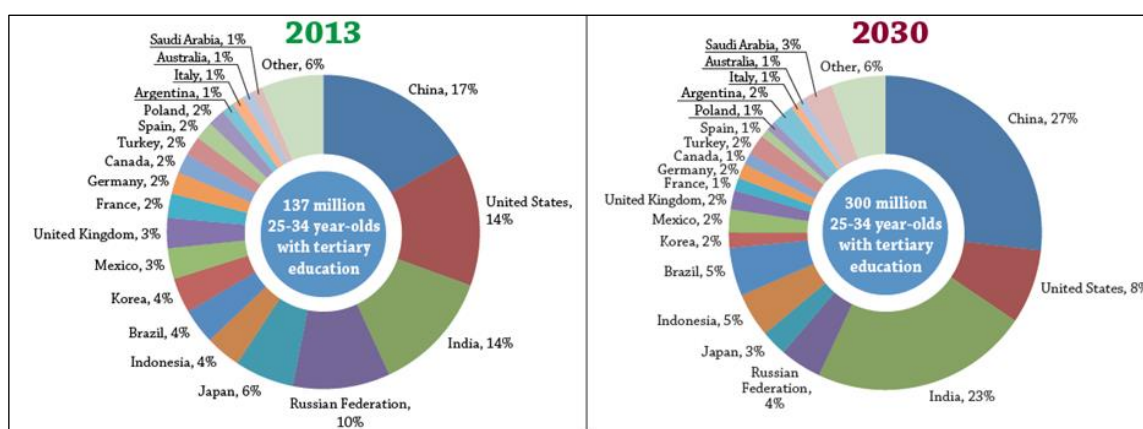


Figure 1. 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary degree across OECD and G20 countries (2013, 2030
Source: OECD (2015). Education Indicators in Focus

There is an increasing number of international students enrolled in tertiary education in the world. According to OECD (2020), in 2018, the number of international students enrolled in tertiary education in the world was 5.6 million and the number has grown on average by 4.8% per year between 1998 and 2008. Furthermore, although OECD countries are leading destinations for international students, in the last years there is an increasing number in non-OECD countries. In 2018, the first major region of origin of students crossing borders and enrolled at a tertiary programme in an OECD country was Asia (57%) and the United States seemed to be the country that attracts the most international students to its universities (18%), followed by Australia (8%), the United Kingdom (18%), and Germany (6%). Additionally, international students are more likely to travel abroad for more advanced education

programmes. There is relatively low enrolment in bachelor's or equivalent programmes (below 5%); however, the number increases significantly at higher levels (see Figure 2, 3, and 4)

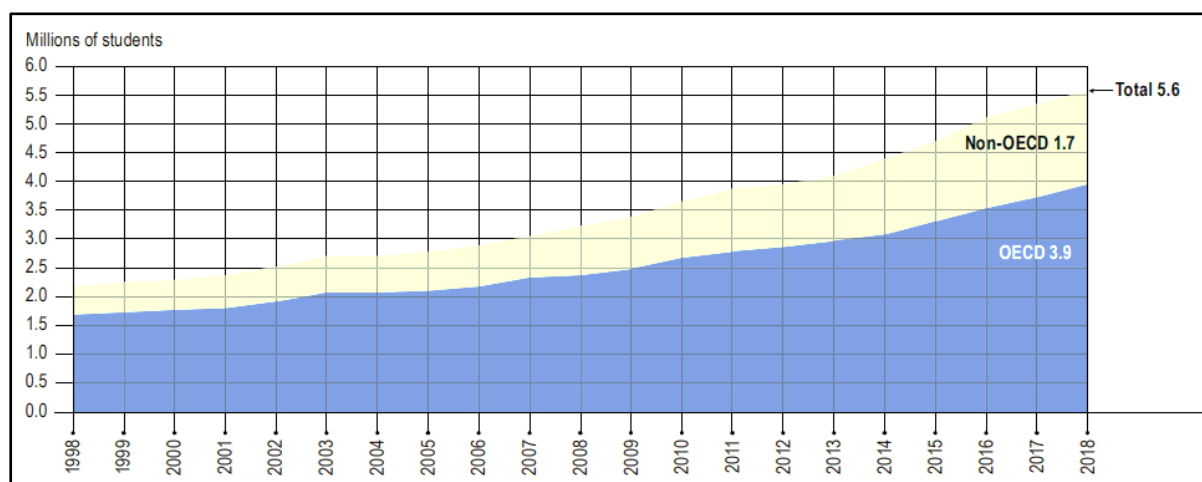


Figure 2. Number of international or foreign students enrolled in OECD and non-OECD countries
Note: The data sources use similar definitions, thus making their combination possible. Missing data were imputed with the closest data reports to ensure that breaks in data coverage do not result in breaks in time series.

Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2020). Other non-OECD countries and years prior to 2013: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. See Source section and Annex 3 (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

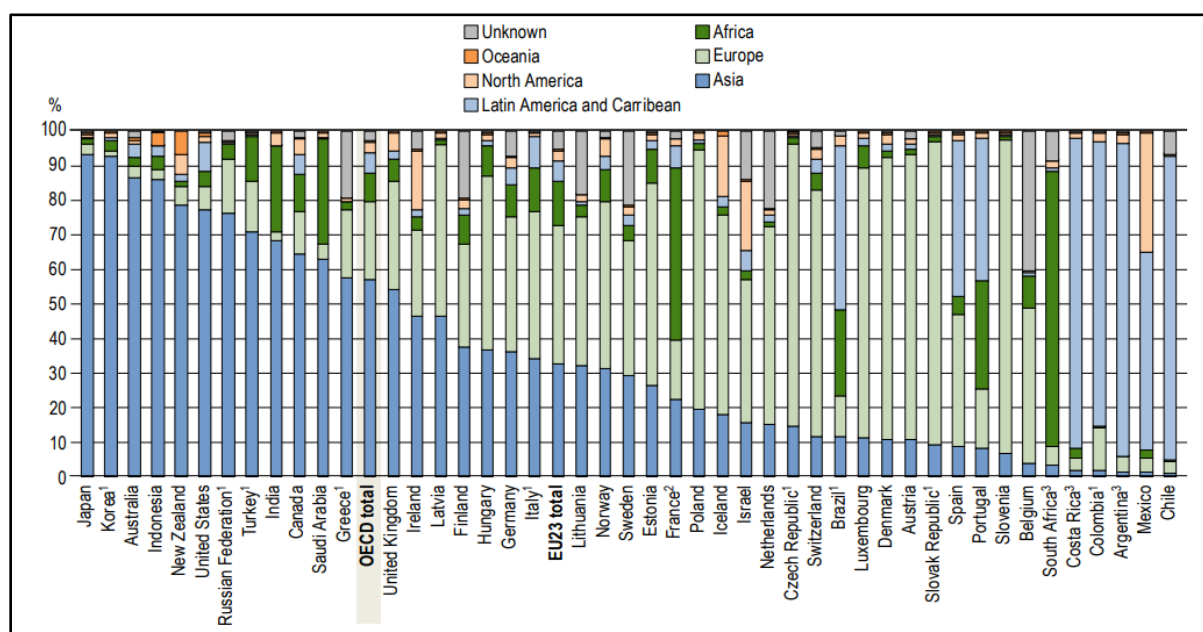


Figure 3. Distribution of international and foreign students by region of origin (2018)

Note: 1. Share of foreign rather than international students. 2. The share of students by country of origin is based on citizenship criteria, while their total number is based on the country of upper secondary education. 3. Year of reference 2017. Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of international or foreign students from Asia.

Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2020). See Source section and Annex 3 (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

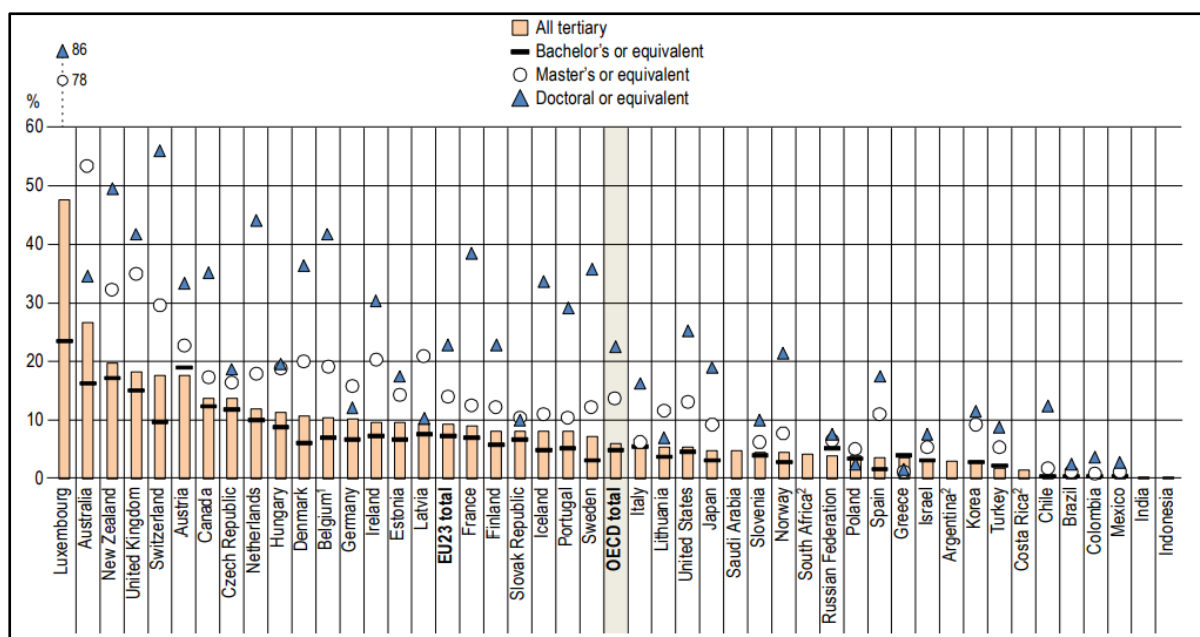


Figure 4. Incoming student mobility in tertiary education, by level of study (2018)

Note: All tertiary education includes short-cycle tertiary programmes, which are not presented separately in the figure. 1. Data on short-cycle tertiary programmes are based on nationality and refer to the Flemish community only. 2. Year of reference 2017. Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of international or foreign students in tertiary education.

Source: OECD (2020), Table B6.1. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>).

An increasingly globalized environment has led to a growing international mobility of people, students who mostly choose an OECD and/or English-speaking destination (OECD, 2013, 2020). In this regard, Mitchell and Nielsen (2012) explain that some people have obtained world consciousness and “see themselves as citizens of the world, free to move about, trade experiences, seek educational opportunities, and pursue work or entertainment” (p.10). The internationalization of education systems and the different policies and actions implemented by some countries to favour the exchange of students have contributed to increasing the international attractiveness of some countries as preferred study destinations, and thus the number of foreigners (including students) has increased in the world. Given that the competition for this student market has increased substantially, prospective international students have started looking more broadly for educational options. In the process, countries like the United States of America and Germany, which were traditionally considered attractive countries to study in, have lost their monopoly on international students. By

contrast, new actors have appeared on the international education market: Korea, New Zealand, Spain, Australia, and the Russian Federation (Guruz, 2011; OECD, 2013).

Education New Zealand (2017) reported that, in 2016, 131 609 international students enrolled at an educational institution in New Zealand. When compared to the same period in the previous year, this number indicated an overall increase of 6 percent in all the sectors except in the Private Training Establishments (PTEs). While Chinese and Indian students represented the largest proportion of the enrolments in 2016 (50%), there has also been an increase of students from other markets. The country experienced a significant enrolment growth in 2014, reporting the highest levels since 2003 in 2015 when the enrolment in higher education grew by 18 percent since the previous year (Education New Zealand, n.d.).

Furthermore, according to OECD (2019), New Zealand has one of the highest shares of international students enrolled in tertiary education. For example, in 2017, 20% of tertiary students came from overseas, compared to the OECD total of 6%. Also, as reported by Education New Zealand (2018), 125,392 international students were in formal tertiary study in 2017. This number of international students enrolled with a New Zealand Education provider declined by 5% compared to the previous year. The decline in the number was due to a 26% decrease in the unfunded private training establishment (PTE) sector, a 17% decrease in the funded PTE sector, and growths in the school (+9%) and university (+7%) sectors.

International students need to meet certain minimum standards to be considered eligible for admission and enter to tertiary education at universities. The admission process and entry requirements vary from context to context. Fraser and Killen (2003) point out that admitting a student to a tertiary education institution indicates that this student would be capable enough to successfully finish the chosen educational program or course. They noted that “To knowingly admit students who, for whatever reason, have no chance of academic success

would be immoral. Therefore, it is necessary to have entry requirements that permit valid student selection decisions to be made” (p. 254). Students are argued to be the main assets of universities, and their academic performance is important in terms of producing high-skilled graduates who could contribute to the country’s economic and social development (Yadav et al., 2012).

When identifying the potential gains of international education, the importance of international students to both host and home countries is acknowledged. As Luhanga (2009) stated, “in a knowledge-based economy, both the public and private sectors benefit from the knowledge and professional skills of graduates” (p.148). As part of a research on non-EU international graduates who studied in the UK, Mellors-Bourne et al. (2013) presented evidence of the benefits brought by international students, such as career progression, social position (status), personal growth, and the development of social and professional contacts. They argued that graduates, being a high performing and skilled workforce, could benefit their employers and economies. According to their findings, international graduates can also benefit education, capacity building, and societal development in their home or host countries. Additionally, benefits can go beyond the graduates’ home or host country because as mobile human resources they can engage with citizens and organizations in other places throughout their future professional lives.

Universities U.K (2014) claimed that governments focus on the international education market because the presence of international students internationalises the academic environment and campus life as well as contributing to the host country economy. For example, in New Zealand, where both attracting and retaining international students are government’s key priorities, international education supported 28,000 jobs and contributed \$2.6 billion to the country’s economy in 2012/13. This was one of the main reasons the government implemented policy changes to help boost international enrolments in the

country (Bethel & Ward, 2014). Furthermore, in 2018, international education made a contribution of approximately \$5.1 billion to the country's economy (Education New Zealand, 2018).

In explaining the benefits of international students flow, Hegarty (2014) argued that the effect of international students can be felt beyond campus boundaries, as this population's monetary strength has also required local economies to be aware of their presence. Almost every industry benefits from international students and the benefits include, but are not limited to, tuition fees, stationary, transportation, food, clothing, travel, and textbooks.

Appendix B: Definitions of International Student across Nations

Country	Criterion	Additional Notes
Australia	Residence	
Austria	Upper secondary diploma	Foreign address, when this information is not available
Belgium	Upper secondary diploma	Citizenship is used when the information on the upper secondary diploma is not available. This is the case for ISCED 5 - associate degree – higher vocational adult education.
Canada	Residence	Non-Canadian citizens excluding landed immigrants (permanent residents)
Chile	Residence	Mobile students are those who are classified by the educational institutions as foreign non-residents. Nevertheless, if it is determined that student has had previous studies in Chile, the student is considered as national.
Czech Republic	Residence	
Denmark	Prior education	Students who have completed a bachelor's degree as international students and subsequently enrol in a second programme (e.g. master's programme) are not counted as international students. This underestimates the number of tertiary students who come to Denmark for the purpose of study
Estonia	Residence	
Finland	Prior education	
France	Upper secondary diploma	Citizenship is used to determine the country of origin
Germany	Prior education	
Hungary	Residence	Citizenship is used to determine the country of origin
Iceland	Prior education	Citizenship, for 644 cases where country of prior education was missing
Ireland	Residence	
Japan	Residence	
Luxembourg	Citizenship	
The Netherlands	Upper secondary diploma	Citizenship is used to determine the country of origin
New Zealand	Residence	Citizenship is used to determine the country of origin

Country	Criterion	Additional Notes
Norway	Residence	The number of international students is underestimated as some international students are granted residency during their studies
Poland	Prior education	Country of upper secondary diploma for ISCED 7 and ISCED 6, not post-graduate
Portugal	Prior education	Definition of the international student is “Country of upper secondary diploma” from 2013/2014. Until 2013/2014, it was defined on the basis of their country of prior education (meaning "previous education": in case of a student at ISCED 7 level, the country of origin is the country where the ISCED 6 degree has been awarded)
Slovak Republic	Residence	Citizenship is used to determine the country of origin
Slovenia	Residence	
Spain	Residence	Citizenship for ISCED 5
Sweden	Residence	International students are defined as students who have a student residence permit or are either non-residents or have moved to Sweden six months before starting their studies. For students at ISCED 8 the time limit is 24 months. Students with student residence permit are reported by country of citizenship while other students are reported by country of birth. Exchange students are not included in the definition above
Switzerland	Prior education	
United Kingdom	Residence	Students reporting a foreign home address
United States	Residence	Students who are not citizens of the United States and who are in this country

Source: OECD. (2016). Education at a Glance 2016. OECD Indicators. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/EAG2016-Annex3.pdf>

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer



Participants **NEEDED**

Be part of a study that looks at factors influencing success or failure in university.

Are you an international undergraduate student at UC?

Are you doing your entire degree at UC?

AND

Are you in your second year of study or above?

If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate.

As a participant you will be asked to:

- ✓ Complete a short information sheet about yourself,
- ✓ Be interviewed between 1 and 3 times. Each interview will take no longer than 1 hour, and you can use different methods to help you express your ideas.

In appreciation of your time, you will receive gift vouchers.

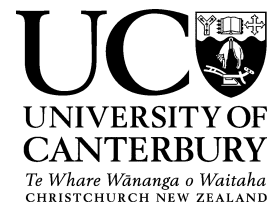


Interested?

Please contact William at
william.eulaththvidal@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix D: Consent Form and Information Sheet

College of Education, Health, and Human Development
Telephone: +64 226727554
Email: william.eulatthvidal@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
Date: __/__/____



Success or Failure at University: International Students' Perspectives **Consent Form for Students**

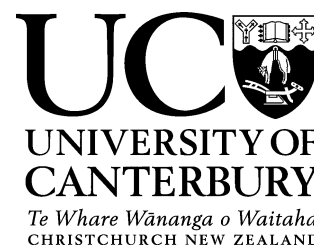
- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the study.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. If I withdraw, I can decide before my information is analysed if I want it to be removed.
- ☐ I understand that I have the right to stop at any time during the interviews and skip questions I would prefer not to answer.
- ☐ I understand that I have the right to review my interview transcripts and ask the researcher to leave out parts which will then not be used.
- ☐ I understand that I will not directly benefit from taking part in this study.
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions I provide will remain confidential.
- ☐ I understand that results may be published in a journal or presented at a conference, and that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library databases.
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after 10 years following the publication of the study.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with taking part of this study and how they will be managed.
- ☐ I understand that I can get more information about this study from the researcher, William Ericsson Eulatth Vidal and/or academic supervisors Missy Morton and Annelies Kamp. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).
- ☐ I would like a summary of the results of the study.
- ☐ By signing below, I agree to participate in this study.

Name: _____ **Signed:** _____ **Date:** __/__/____

Email address (for report of findings, if applicable): _____
Please return this consent form to me in the envelope provided.

William Ericsson Eulatth Vidal

College of Education, Health, and Human Development
Telephone: +64 226727554
Email: william.eulatthvidal@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
Date: __/__/____



Success or Failure at University: International Students' Perspectives

Information Sheet for Students as Participants

Hello my name is William Ericsson Eulatth Vidal. I am currently a PhD student from the College of Education, Health, and Human Development at the University of Canterbury. I am conducting a study to explore international students' perspectives on factors influencing success or failure in university.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study as I am looking for international undergraduate students in their second year of study or above from disciplines at the University of Canterbury.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a short information sheet about yourself that will take approximately five minutes, and to take part in one to four interviews that will take no longer than one hour each. Moreover, you will be free to use photos, videos, and pieces of arts or writing to help you express your ideas. Also, you might be invited to voluntarily participate in a focus group discussion.

The interviews will be conducted on university campus. However, in case you require another location, this may be decided according to your preference. I will not interfere with your daily academic courses, activities, or private life; therefore, the time, date and place to meet will be agreed between you and me. Furthermore, English will be the means of communication, and the interviews will be audio recorded.

It is completely up to you whether to participate. If you do participate you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw, you can decide whether you want any of the information that you have contributed up to that point to be removed or if you will allow me to use it. Also, I will provide you with your interview transcripts. You have the right to review them and ask me to leave out parts which will then not be used. You can decide before your information is analyzed if you want me to remove it. After that time, it will become impossible for me to remove it.

You have the right to stop the interview at any time if you wish and skip questions you would prefer not to answer. If at any point you are uncomfortable with my note-taking or questioning, you can let me know so I can change what I am doing.

You will not directly benefit from taking part in this study, but information gathered may be useful to promote future actions that enhance international students' chances of success in university and help them develop to their full potential. If you decide you do not want to participate, or you change your mind about your participation there would be no consequence to you.

Nibbles and drinks will be provided every time you join an interview, and at the conclusion of your participation in the study you will be given a gift voucher for each time you are interviewed.

I will take particular care to ensure that any information obtained through the study and that can identify you remains confidential. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of results. Your name will be replaced with pseudonyms, and it will not be possible for you to be identified in any reporting of the data gathered. All your data will be securely stored in a password protected space on the University server (password protected UC desktop computer and laptop) and locked file cabinet at my University office for ten years following the publication of the study. It will then be destroyed.

My academic supervisors and I will gain complete access to your data. The only other person who may have access is a transcriber. This person may help listen to the recordings and produce a written record of what you and others have said. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement.

The results may be published in a journal or presented at a conference, and they will be published in the University of Canterbury library databases. Upon request, I will provide you with a summary of results on completion of the study.

I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

In case you have any questions regarding this study you are welcome to contact me or my academic supervisors. Our contact details are given below.

My study has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and you should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you have read and understood this information sheet, any questions you had have been answered, and you would like to be a participant in this study, please now see and complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided by __/__.

I am looking forward to learning about your experiences as an international student.

William Ericsson Eulatth Vidal

Contact details of the researcher

Name of researcher: William Ericsson Eulatth Vidal
Address: University of Canterbury. Room: Wheki 352.
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226727554

Contact details of supervisors

Name of main supervisor: Dr Missy Morton
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Name of associate supervisor: Dr Annelies Kamp
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Christchurch 8140. New Zealand.
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44056

Appendix E: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET		Instructions	
		Complete the cells with a written answer or mark your response with an [X] where is expected	
Preferred name	<input type="text"/>	Age	<input type="text"/>
Country of origin	<input type="text"/>		
Gender	Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Trans <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="text"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/>	First language	<input type="text"/>
Home in New Zealand	On-campus <input type="checkbox"/> Off-campus <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/>		
Year of study	Second year <input type="checkbox"/> Third year <input type="checkbox"/> Fourth year <input type="checkbox"/>	Phone	<input type="text"/>
Health problem	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/>		
Major at UC	<input type="text"/>		
Scholarship	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/>		
Student type	Part time student <input type="checkbox"/> Full time student <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/>	Work	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/>
Ethnicity	White <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American <input type="checkbox"/> Native American/American <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="text"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/>		
Religion	Christian <input type="checkbox"/> Muslim <input type="checkbox"/> Catholic <input type="checkbox"/> Buddhist <input type="checkbox"/> Atheist <input type="checkbox"/> Agnostic <input type="checkbox"/> Non-religious <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="text"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/>	Marital status	Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed <input type="checkbox"/> Separated <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="text"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/>
Children	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/>		
THANK YOU VERY MUCH!			

Appendix F: Interview Schedule

No.	Main Questions	Probing Questions
1	Tell me how you are currently feeling?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>For example, think about your mood, health, etc.</i> • <i>How well you think you can cope with day-to-day life?</i>
2	Think about what you do inside and outside university campus and describe what a typical week looks like for you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What do your holidays and break look like? / What does your schedule during class period look like?</i> • <i>How similar or different is your week during holidays or break to your week during class period?</i> • <i>Ok, let's talk about your timetable for the week. What do you think about it? What do you think about how your time is organized?</i> • <i>How often you attend classes? Why?</i> • <i>Have you ever joined any kind of extracurricular activity? Why?</i> • <i>Have you heard about the co-curricular record-CCR? If so, what do you think about it?</i> • <i>What you usually have for breakfast, lunch and dinner is what you usually have back home? Why?</i> • <i>What are the best/the worst things that could happen to you during your week? Why?</i>
3	What would you say about your motivations for your university life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Who/what influenced these motivations? How?</i> • <i>Have they changed? If so, how?</i>
4	What results you desire for your university life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What did you plan for your university life? / What are your priorities? Have they changed? If so, how?</i> • <i>How do you feel about what you have accomplished so far? / How satisfied are you with what you have accomplish so far?</i> • <i>Do you think about the future much? What are your future plans?</i>
5	What is success at university for you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What does successful international student mean to you?</i> • <i>What do you have to say about failure?</i> • <i>Do you consider you think the same way about what success or failure is as your friends, family or people from university?</i>

No.	Main Questions	Probing Questions
6	If you think back when you made your choice to pursue university studies, how ready you think you were for university?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider what you think you were lacking, what information you had, etc. • What were your expectations of university life? When you started out as a student what did you think your university life would be like? • How has the reality matched up with what you imagined? • How do you think your previous academic/personal experiences equipped you for the demands you encounter as part of your university life? • What information you had about your major? / What information you had about the difficulty level of your major?
7	Now that you are a student, what you think you need in order to achieve the results you desire for your university life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about personal characteristics such as age, sex or gender, personality, skills, knowledge, language, etc. • Do you think sex/gender matters in university? Do male and female students have the same abilities to accomplish their goals? If so, what do you think are your strengths and weaknesses being a female/male student? • Do you think age matters in university? Do young and mature students have the same abilities to accomplish their goals? If so, what do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of being a young/mature student? • Do you think intelligence matters in university? If so, how? • How does not having English as a first language affect your university life?
8	Let's talk about your social life. What does it look like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about the people you interact the most within and beyond university campus. Think about frequency, characteristic, etc. • What do you think about engaging with local people and community? • Tell me how easy or difficult is to make local friends for you • Do you keep in touch with people back home? If so, how often? Who and what are their particular characteristics? • Tell me about your family background? • What do you think people you interact with are doing or can do to help you succeed as an international student? • While in NZ, do you prefer to stay at home or somewhere else? Why? • How do you think your civil status affects university life? • What do you think about love relationships? How do you think having love relationships might affect your university life?

No.	Main Questions	Probing Questions
9	How is it living in a foreign country?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What do you think is an international student?</i> • <i>Describe if you ever perceived any difference that international students experience when compared to local students</i> • <i>What assumptions does local people make about international students?</i> • <i>How do you think the fact that you are an international person influence the way local people treat you? Have you ever experienced or witnessed discrimination here? If so, please, tell me more about it</i> • <i>How do you feel about other international students?</i> • <i>How do you think the cultural differences between NZ and your home country impactst your university life or experience?</i> • <i>What are the things you miss the most/the least from home?</i>
10	Now, let's talk specifically about UC. So based on your own experience what you can say about what UC offers you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Think about your study program (course timetable, number of students per class, difficulty, curriculum, etc.), lecturers, physical condition of the university, etc. and how they meet your needs</i> • <i>What do you like the most/the least about UC?</i> • <i>In general, describe how you think what UC offers you impacts on your chances to achieve your goals in university</i>
11	What is your opinion in terms of whether or not a gap exists between international and local students' chances to achieve goals in university?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Describe if presently you identify there is something being done to address this perceived gap</i>
12	In general, what do you find most/the least enjoyable about being an international student?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you could change anything about your undergraduate experience what would it be?</i>
13	What would you advise a person who wants to be an international student?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Why you would give such advice?</i>
14	Please tell me any last thought you feel would be important when describing what may hinder or promote your chances to accomplish your goals in university.	N/A
15	Do you have any questions for me?	N/A

Appendix G: Ethical Clearance



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
Telephone: +64 03 364 2987, Extn 45588
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: 2016/59/ERHEC

2 November 2016

William Ericsson Eulatth Vidal
College of Education, Health and Human Development
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear William

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal "Success or Failure at University: International Student's Perspectives" has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 1st November 2016.

Should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

PP

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'R. Robinson'.

Patrick Shepherd
Chair
Educational Research Human Ethics Committee

Please note that ethical approval relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research.

F E S

Appendix H: UC's Mission and Vision



Note: From Strategic Vision 2020 to 2030. Retrieved from <https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/strategy/>

Appendix I: UC Graduate Attributes



Note: From What is the graduate profile? Retrieved from <https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/graduate-profile/employers/what-are-the-graduate-attributes/>